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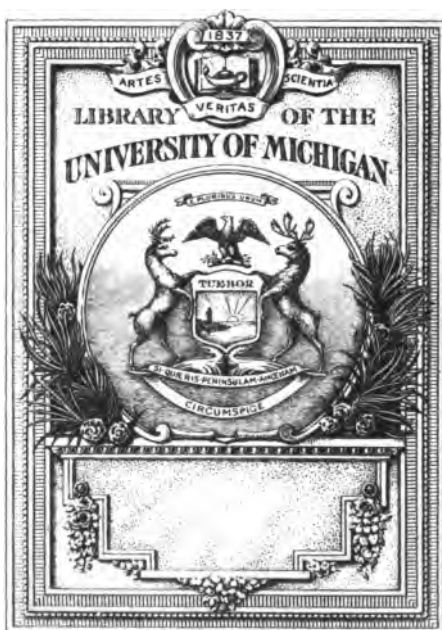
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A RANDOM ITINERARY

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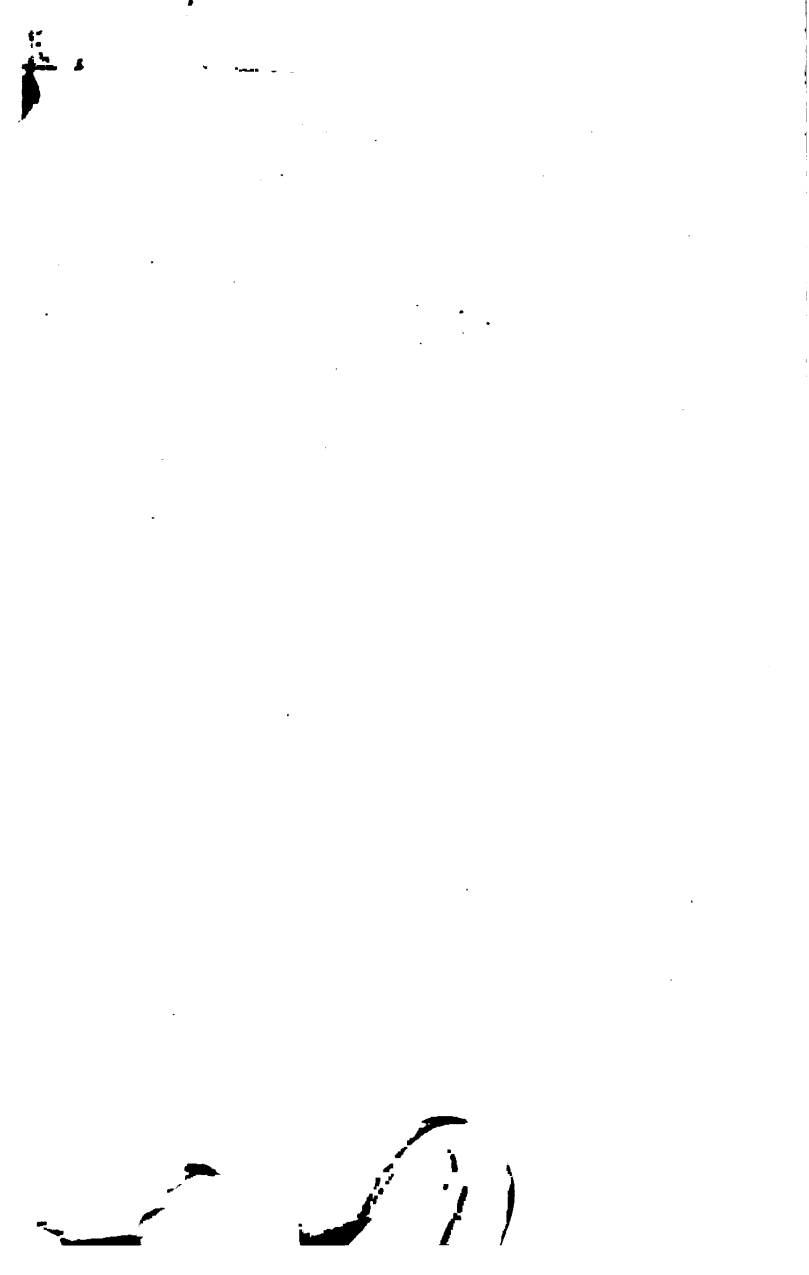
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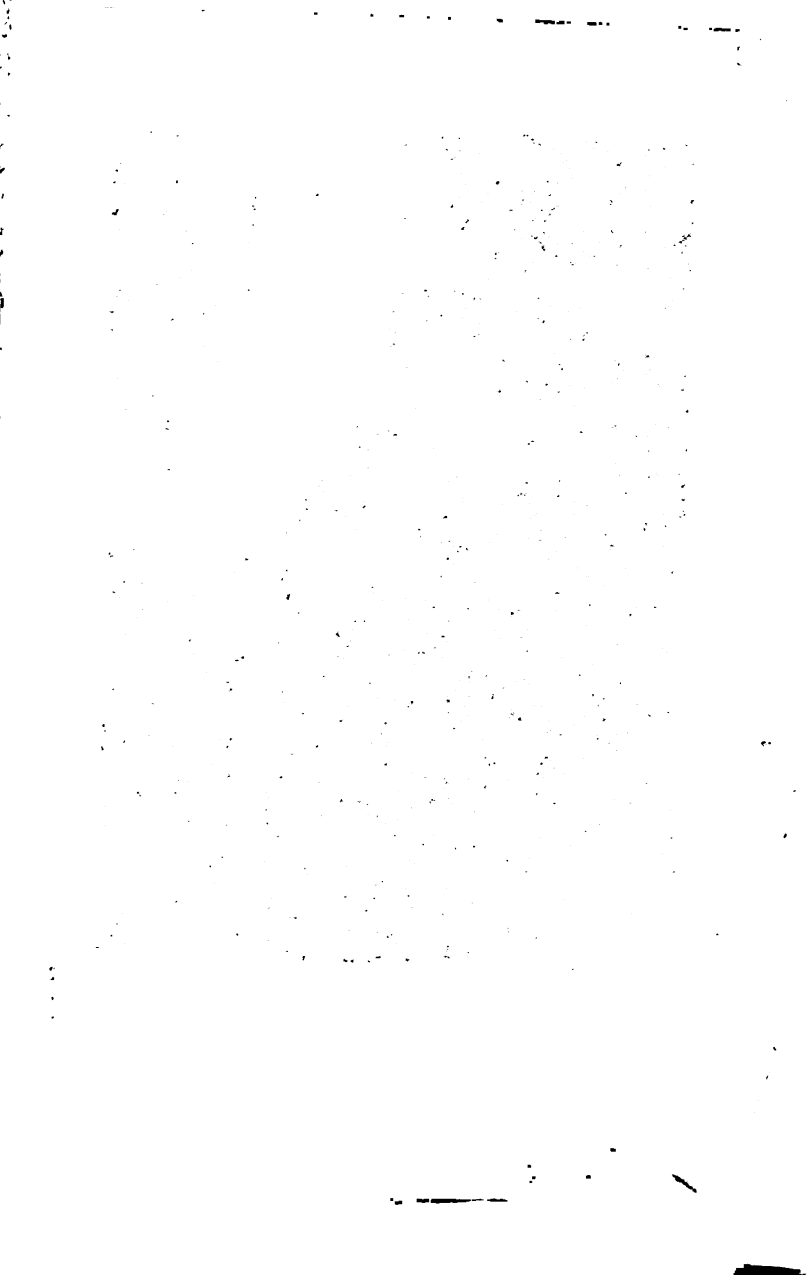
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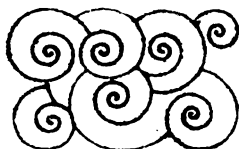






A RANDOM ITINERARY

By JOHN
DAVIDSON



LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS
AND JOHN LANE
BOSTON
COPELAND & DAY 1894

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Perhaps some notes and impressions of the remarkable spring and summer of 1893 may save these papers, temporarily at least, from the charge of irrelevancy, lately levelled at all books.

J. D.

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THE THIRTY-EIGHTH OF MARCH

By the calendar, April was a week old ; by the weather, it was still March — the extraordinary March of 1893. A little unsteady weather at the beginning, a half-hearted attempt to be the old conventional month, the tempestuous character of the play ; and then March refused to act any longer. At the very lowest figure, according to the computation of orthodox chronologists, Time, lessee of the earth and actor-manager, presented in 1893 his great spectacular drama 'The Seasons,' for the 5897th year ; and during that long run March had never given him any real difficulty before. How Time must have

fumed behind the scenes, tearing his forelock and menacing with his scythe at the sight of this bluff old month suddenly flinging off his robe of storms to flaunt it as a *jeune premier* with a sky-blue cloak and a reckless expenditure of sunshine.

‘There will be nothing left for June and July,’ thought Time, ‘if this madman wastes the properties at such a rate.’

April waited to come on, bewildered and demoralised. His cue was ‘goes out like a lamb’; but March, shaking his golden fleece, began to go out like a lamb as soon as he faced the footlights, and prolonged his exit indefinitely before an entranced audience.

In the morning his cloak was pearl - grey, thin and luminous, the finest stuff, and most delicate texture of which clouds are spun. Behind it were the sunbeams and the blue sky; but March, no lightning - change artist like

April chafing in the flies, seldom doffed till nearly noon his rich but sober dressing-gown to appear the gilded youth he was. A strong, fresh east wind blew a shrill fife all day before him; keen, sweet, with mellow notes when the sun got up.

On the thirty-eighth of March it behoved an itinerant to visit Epping Forest. He came to Chingford, and left behind the many-gabled Royal Forest Hotel, the golf course with its red flags and early golfers, the donkeys browsing on the thorn bushes, and went right into the wood that beckons every voyager to come and know its secret. He had soon to turn aside from the impenetrable under-growth of hawthorn, gay with big green leaves already, and black-thorn drenched and dripping with snow-white blossom.

He took one of the green rides which intersect the forest and quickened his pace; the singing

east was chill, but another song delayed him. Behind, out of Chingford Plain, a solitary lark scaled the skies. Some days before the itinerant had heard a lark on a London common; but this was another affair. Compared with the Chingford lark, the London bird was as a street-singer to a heaven-born tenor. There was no fog in the forest bird's throat; smoke never tarnished the dew he sipped; his wings were sinewy; he seemed to soar out of sight of the London bird's highest reach, and his robust and powerful music, unlike the echoless cockney song, reverberated from the ceiling of heaven in cascades of dying sound. Then came the sudden headlong descent in which the lark repeats over and over with breathless haste and without transitions, the various *motifs* of his song, as if he were refreshing his memory before attending to his earthly cares; and the itinerant was again free to pursue the woodland path.

All along the way the blackthorn blossom, as fresh as paint, gleamed against the brownish purple of the budded but still leafless trees. As fresh as paint! The itinerant could think of nothing else that might hint in words the dead, shining whiteness of the blossom. Seen by the veiled light—no beam had yet pierced the pearl-grey sky—sometimes a straggling bush, with not a speck of green, and with the little white flowers sticking close to the branches, embossing them and seeming to run together, looked like a plant that had been dipped in whitewash and set up to dry. Every now and again a glade or bottom opened out; strung on the green ride like the greater beads on a rosary. In these the commoners' cattle grazed, young cows and rough-coated ponies surfeiting on the grass that began to be succulent. One glade was girdled almost entirely with the flake-white blossom, a dead white, of a bluish tinge like wet paint; where the

branches clustered thickly, drenched and heavy with flowers; cold-looking, non-luminous in the grey light and against the dull purple of the leafless forest trees; masses, bunches, and strokes of chilly white on a dark ground; the itinerant knew they were blossoms, but his eyes did not tell him so.

It was in this glade that March began to put off his pearl-grey robe and throw about his sunshine. Wherever a beam fell on a blackthorn bush the dead colour turned to living flowers; the cold shining gleam of wet paint gave place to a dusky warm gloss, and the masses, bunches, and strokes of Chinese white changed into bouquets, nosegays, and garlands of creamy, fragrant blossom.

There were hollies everywhere, with all a month's dust on their hardy leaves. Now that the sun had come out a ground-bee crept from her nest, and flew singing into the thicket. Peering

above the tawny carpet of dried leaves one or two wood-violets showed their light delicate hue and breathed their faint subtlest of odours. Stooping to pick one, the itinerant saw that it was being visited by a dapper little spider ; and he wondered if insects have an æsthetic sense of smell, if, like himself, the gallant spider wished to scent the fragrance of the violet. Do bees and butterflies enjoy the odours of the flowers they frequent? It must be so : they watch the blushing of the wild rose, and gather the sweetness of the violet.

A blackbird hopped out of a clump of pollard hornbeam, and flew deeper into the wood with a thick guttural cry, 'Tut-tut-tut-tut,' as much as to say, 'Here's another wretched cockney, and I thought the Easter holidays were over !'

A robin with his olive back and red gills loitered about a mole-hill waiting till the itinerant should be near enough to witness his

heroism. He had found a long red worm ; and as soon as he felt certain that his proceedings were observed, he pulled it out of the ground with a fierce tug, flourished it round his head, thrashed the ground with it, stamped on it, slung it over his shoulder, and flew to covert, his victim streaming in the wind of his flight like a tattered pennon. A Don Quixote of a robin ! He evidently felt himself an eagle conquering a serpent.

The path the itinerant followed would have led him to Highbeach had he known it ; thither he wished to go, but he missed the proper turning and came out on a made road at the fringe of the forest. Here a man in a smock-frock was paring the sward that bordered the way ; a cheerful-looking man, somewhat round-shouldered, but tall, with cane-coloured beard and hair, and a fresh complexion, hardly tanned as yet. The itinerant inquired the way of this agreeable

ditcher, and having been directed how to recover the green ride he had lost, he started a conversation about the forest.

ITINERANT. Have you no names for these forest-paths? (*The itinerant had read in romances of names given to woodland ways.*)

DITCHER. They are mostly called green rides. Some of them have names. If you be from Chingford you came by the Bury Path and along the Woodman's Glade. This here is Motts Street, the road you're in just now. It takes you to Highbeach if you like. The other way there through the forest is just a green ride.

ITINERANT. I suppose things are well forward this season.

DITCHER. Yes, they be. I see a nine-killer th' other day.

ITINERANT. A nine-killer?

DITCHER. What you call a shrike. The bird that likes hung meat.

ITINERANT. But why do you call it a nine-killer ?

DITCHER. 'Cause he always catches nine beetles, or whatever he's after, and sticks 'em on thorns in his larder before he begins to eat.

ITINERANT. Then he's a better counter than the crow which can't go beyond three.

DITCHER. Ay, sir.

ITINERANT. And does the nine-killer not usually appear so soon ?

DITCHER. No ; he don't hardly ever come till end of April.

ITINERANT. I suppose there are a great many kinds of birds and beasts in the forest.

DITCHER. There be ; all kinds. Every creature has a chance here. They keeps it wild, you know, sir, now. A bit o' nature.

ITINERANT. Deer, foxes, stoats, badgers, weasels, otters—eh ?

DITCHER. Yes, and wolves.

ITINERANT. What? wolves! Wolves within twelve miles of London. I thought there had been no wolves in the British Isles for many years.

DITCHER. They have 'em here. I never seen 'em; but I hear 'em howl at night.

The itinerant is easily imposed on; but in this matter he thought he could take a heavy handicap and beat the hedger.

ITINERANT. Well; I had no idea you had wolves too. I saw a den of lions in the Woodman's Glade, and a boa-constrictor dangling in a spear-oak. These I expected of course. They are provided by the County Council for the children to play with on holidays; but it's news to me about the wolves.

DITCHER (*indifferently*). Ay, sir.

ITINERANT. Many wolves?

DITCHER. I don't know. Prairie wolves they call 'em.

ITINERANT. If I follow the green ride then, it will take me to Highbeach.

DITCHER. It will, sir. Through Fairmead Bottom and by the Hill Wood.

ITINERANT. Thank you, very much. Good-day.

DITCHER. Good-day, sir.

The itinerant was not satisfied about the wolves, and had more light on the subject before he left the forest.

The blackthorn blossom had ceased along the ride. Besides the hollies, almost the only green visible was that of the common hawthorn. Pollard hornbeams, spear-oaks, beeches, and crab-apple trees crowded their buds together, with here a maple in a marshy place, and there a willow in a sheltered hollow. Many of the oaks wore much of their last year's dress, crinkled leaves of rusty gold that pattered against each other in the wind. The pinkish shade of the unburst buds made with the

dark branches and trunks the purple hue already mentioned.

Towards Highbeach, the gorse began, fine old whins bursting into bloom, yellower than buttercups. Highbeach is a hamlet with cottages, houses with walled gardens, and a steepled church clustered midway on the verge of the forest. Here the ground rises to a height of about three hundred and fifty feet, and the itinerant looked out across a wide undulating plain, with red tiles and blue slates in the foreground, a long trail of steam from a train in the middle distance, and a succession of ridges beyond away across Hertfordshire to Kensworth Hill, on the borders of Bedford—a wide hazy prospect, blown over by a strong east wind, under a blue sky, flecked with white. While he surveyed the broad English landscape, the mellow bell of Highbeach Church rang twelve. Before the peal was ended Waltham Abbey, a mile and a half away, took up the ringing,

and another iron tongue, more distant still—at Cheshunt perhaps or Epping—chimed faintly in ; and the tale of noon was told in a three-voiced glee.

The itinerant was hungry. In Dick Turpin's Cave, a homely inn on the brink of the bank, he purchased for the customary fourpence a pint of bitter beer.

'I wish to take it outside,' he said, and tendered a shilling.

'Very well, sir ; I'll keep the shilling till you come back : that's eightpence on the pot,' said the damsel of the inn.

It was dismaying not to be trusted, but the itinerant wore a fore-and-aft cap, and a faded light tweed suit, and looked, doubtless, very insolvent. 'Eightpence on the pot !' He had become for the time being a sort of pawnbroker, and had lent a young woman eightpence on a pewter pot.

In a hollow half full of whins and sheltered from the wind, he sat down and undid the satchel he carried over his shoulder. It contained a piece of pie, some bread and butter, and three books—Shakespeare's 'Sonnets,' Wither's 'Mistress of Philarete,' and Carlyle's 'Past and Present.' He handled the books one after the other as he took his lunch. The sun had grown strong, and small bees, looking only half-grown, with big yellow thighs—much too big for their bodies—buzzed among the gorse. He heard them loud in a bush behind him, and turned to look. They moved from yellow flower to flower with great rapidity; it was surely by miracle that they escaped impaling themselves on the close-ranked spines of the whins. Above through a blossomless thorn the wind sang shrilly. On one side the tops of a cluster of dark Scotch firs appeared, and through a dent in the ridge of the hollow he caught a glimpse of the haze that lay on Essex and Hertford, rolling

thinly over woody ridge and fallow field. A great ground-bee went twanging past, its rich bourdon rising and falling on the wind.

The itinerant thought what an admirable institution eating and drinking is, and slipped his books back into his satchel. He meditated on the noble part eating and drinking plays in literature. Dickens is full of it; unromantic guzzling, and bourgeois stuffing and gormandising, always in the highest of spirits. Scott has delightful feeding; the breakfast at Tillietudlem, and the midnight supper of the Black Knight and the Holy Friar of Copmanhurst; and Shakespeare's feasts and banquets from 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' to 'Macbeth' and 'The Tempest'; Sancho Panza's many meals made on the homeliest fare, or on the rich scumming of the pot at Camacho's marriage; and the heroic entertainments of Pantagruel.

A bird perched on a whin and said, as the itinerant had heard it often say in Methven Wood,

'Where have you been since this time last year?'

It fluttered to another bush, repeated the same rapid sentence, and flew away. Again a ground-bee twanged past like a harp-string struck in the air. A finch in a thorn behind chaffed him with its 'chap-chap-chap-chap-chap,' ending in a prolonged and suddenly closed 'pewee,' which had exactly the effect of an impudent wink.

The damsel in Dick Turpin's Cave redeemed the pewter pot; and the itinerant took the road again. For a little way he followed a made path, thick with white dust and rough with big pebbles. A large red fly, which looked as if it were semi-transparent, flitted about among the dust like a winged ruby. He reached a region of heather and bracken where the trees were scanty, and left the made road for a cattle path. It was tiresome, however, walking in the treacherous ground, and he resumed the dusty way.

March had now donned his blue mantle, and

was busy spending all the sunshine he had. The piping wind kept down the heat, and lifted the dust only in whiffs.

At the Wake Arms, an inn near the north-western extremity of the forest, the itinerant saw a fruit-tree laden with blossom, passionate with fragrance, and resonant with bees. Here he turned about and took the London road straight through the forest, a made road, inch thick in white dust seamed with pebbles. Hitherto he had walked mostly on grass, through gorse and ling, and tawny bracken, over rusty heather or dead leaves, and the long white way undulating right on into the misty horizon and danced over by phantom puffs of dust, had its fascination. The road was higher than the general level of the forest, but there were frequent acclivities on either side, and birch-trees appeared upon the slopes. Young and lady-like, they had hurried on their leaves sooner than their companions. Against the

purple background they quivered and flashed and shot up, drooping their slim branches like fountains of green spray lit from within. Suddenly on the right, the forest opened an eye and looked at the itinerant—Wake Valley Pond glittering in the sun. He saw that a landscape without water is like the face of a blind man; and he tarried by the pond where the withered sedges rustled until the last diamond that sparkled among the ripples died out as the sun went west.

Soon he came to a green ride on the left and followed it. Here he met a man studying a guide-book with maps.

‘Is there,’ he said, surprising the other itinerant by the suddenness of his address, ‘anything in your book about wolves?’

‘About wolves,’ echoed the other man, who was very cool. ‘Yes, there is something about wolves in *my* book,’ with a reproving emphasis on the possessive.

ITINERANT. I should be much obliged to you if you would tell me what it is.

THE OTHER ITINERANT. Certainly ; here it is. ' An animal was purchased as a cub by a gentleman living in Leytonstone, from a hay-carter, who said that he had caught it with two others in the forest, and described them as fox-cubs.' Then it says when this cub grew up it turned out to be a prairie wolf. The conjecture is that its parents must have been wolves enlarged by mistake for Spanish foxes.

ITINERANT. And is that a reliable book ?

THE OTHER ITINERANT. Rather. It's by the verderer, Mr Edward North Buxton.

ITINERANT (*convinced at once and much impressed by the old name, and also fully persuaded that the ditcher had been reading the verderer's book*). Oh ! the verderer ! Can you tell me where this green ride will lead me ?

THE OTHER ITINERANT. Yes ; it will lead you past the Roman remains to Loughton.

ITINERANT. Thank you very much.

THE OTHER ITINERANT. The verderer's book costs only a shilling ; you can get it at any railway station in the neighbourhood, and it's very useful.

It was a little impudent of the other itinerant to say that, but of course he couldn't know that *the* itinerant never buys guide-books ; besides, the itinerant had blurted out his question too informally to begin with.

He never saw the Roman remains ; he must have passed by them or even through them ; but he was dreaming of other things, and found himself at Loughton before he knew where he was. By Warren Park and over Warren Hill, along the Ranger's Road and past Connaught Water, he came to Chingford Plain, whence he had started in the morning shortly before eleven. It

was now past four, and the red-coated golfers were scattered over the course. Little groups of excursionists hung about the Royal Forest Hotel, with brakes, landaus, victorias, bicycles, and tricycles. All round the horizon the haze gathered thickly—March twitching his pearl-grey mantle about him again; but the blue dome of the sky was still clear overhead.

At a cloud-high altitude two crows flew up from Walthamstow making for the forest. Above the border where the blackthorn began, one of them turned towards the west; the other hesitated, hung on its wing a second, and then followed. They seemed to dash into the sun, but that was a mistake. Wheeling right round they hastened back to Walthamstow; perhaps they had been eloping and had thought better of it. Another crow passing under them in an opposite direction considered them attentively, and looked back with an odd turn of his head; but he

cannot have been the forsaken husband, for he pursued his onward course. A lark with a voice like a bugle shattered its radiant song against the sky, and a ground-bee sounded across the plain—an *Æolian* harp of a single string humming in the wind.



IN EXPECTATION OF RAIN

IN EXPECTATION OF RAIN

I—WOODGREEN COMMON

THINKING that a change was surely due, the itinerant resolved to see the earth slake its long-continued thirst. A scanty shower had fallen the night before, and the dusty scent of the roads and commons still lingered on the morning air. But the day was most fantastic. The rags of a thin fog, like wisps of dew-drenched gossamer, trailed over the gardens and hung about the poplars; a westerly wind blew with a moist smell, and the soft grey sky, welling with rain, seemed about to overflow. By half-past nine a strong sunbeam had bored through the clouds, and the

wisps of fog flew up and vanished. Before the bell of the parish church rang ten, through the hole made by the first beam the light had streamed, flooding the sky and changing it from grey to a milky porcelain, and in another minute or two the porcelain had melted away, like a wasted iceboard in the water, and the blue firmament spread from horizon to horizon. 'No rain to-day,' he thought.

Scarcely an hour had passed when the clouds began to climb on all sides. Rising stealthily on each other's shoulders, they peered over the world, stood up, stretched themselves, and then settled down in their places, each new-comer smothering the one beneath him. Shortly the whole sky was sombre again; the wind strengthened and grew clammy; and the itinerant went out to the common, confident that at last the rain had come.

Chapped and seamed all over, the common

gaped for water. Brown and burned, the patches of parched green fewer than the bare places, it looked as if a troop of lazy flames had lounged over it, licking at random. The itinerant lifted from among the cracks pieces of soil a foot square and three or four inches thick, loosened and baked by the long drought; but while he stooped over the withered ground the sun came out and smote him between the shoulders. He looked up, and saw the last of the clouds slipping down over the horizon like guilty things. 'No rain to-day.'

II—BLACKHEATH AND GREENWICH PARK

In the afternoon, however, the clouds made a third attempt. They massed themselves in battalions, and crowded and thronged, towering and stooping over the earth, eager, but still withheld. The itinerant felt convinced now that the rain would come before sundown; and remembering how important an event the first real shower

of the season would be, he thought it might be more becoming to witness it on some historic ground than on an unknown suburban common. He selected Blackheath, and arrived there about four. From the top of the 'bus that took him from Liverpool Street to London Bridge he noticed the watery shine of the sky reflected on the smooth asphalt of the streets, and was still hopeful: the westerly wind also felt cool and moist. But long before he came to Blackheath the air seemed to blow out of a furnace, the clouds hung on their arms, standing at ease round the verge of the world; and the itinerant said to himself for the third time, 'No rain to-day.'

The itinerant had never seen Blackheath before, and was somewhat disappointed at first, but soon came to like it, an immense sheet of brown linoleum spread on a rugged surface, crumpled here and there, worn into holes, dirty, and stained with grass-green paint. Fine old

houses bordered it on the south and east ; on either hand hung the wooded height of Blackheath Hill, and the terraced slopes of Lee ; on the north, Greenwich Park filled up a long, broad, uninterrupted line of foliage. The clouds were again rising stealthily, shouldering each other up, and crowding each other down ; thunderous clouds, they rolled and tumbled about the horizon, stood a moment and scanned the earth, and then lay all along once more, confused and incommoded by their number and hugeness, mere vapouring giants unable to fling out a single shower.

There were no cracks in the heath, it is only in clay that these gaping wounds appear. Boys and men were dotted over it, playing cricket and golf. A stray carriage, an accustomed 'bus rolled along the highways that cross it, and it was watered by one solitary watering cart. The itinerant failed to notice immediately what a piece

of irony this was; but soon he perceived it to be one of those unconscious practical jokes the perpetration of which may ultimately prove to be the final cause of all officialdom. One watering-cart to Blackheath! Sedulously the waterman led his stooping horse: the water burst from the pierced pipe with as much confidence as if it had been a second deluge pouring from the windows of heaven; and in a little while a tiny spot of the brown, worn, and green-stained linoleum was wet and glistening: in like manner a canary sprinkles from its glass an infinitesimal shower on a parlour floor.

And now at last the itinerant understood the clouds. It was this watering-cart they thronged to see; they pushed and rose upon each other to catch a glimpse of it; nudged and dug each other in the ribs, and then fell down dissolved in silent laughter. Certainly as long as they were in that mood there would be no rain.

The itinerant lingered in Greenwich Park till after twilight. Again and again he wondered at the natural lattice-work on the trunks of the old Spanish chestnuts. As he lounged among the trees they seemed to keep up a stately antique dance; trunk glided noiselessly past trunk; clusters that looked like one great tree shed off couples to right and left; in figures and chains they flitted about, their robes of green brocade hanging stiffly round them, and blackbirds piped the golden notes to which the park moved in its grave minuet. In the hollows the mist gathered, and as darkness fell, shy creatures stole from tree to tree—the fallow deer, come from their enclosure to snatch a supper of the crusts and crumbs left by the human visitors.

III—EPPING FOREST

Next day was equally fantastic, but the itinerant was not to be misled until towards evening a moist odour came up on the wind. He was still

in the mood to behold the earth assuage its prolonged thirst, and this time he went to Epping Forest.

Chingford Plain was a network of cracks, every one pleading dumbly to the tantalising skies. The clouds that had promised so bounteously slunk away, and the red sun went west in a saffron mist. The emerald of the young oak-leaves, and the wan blossom of the hawthorn seemed fainting for rain ; but the green smell of the forest, and the spicy smell of the dry earth, were as refreshing as a salad. A cuckoo went off close beside the itinerant, beating its golden gong ; and he heard an odd thing the like of which he has not seen recorded. The bird called nine times, and *a half*. At the fifth call it said only 'cuck,' and stopped as if something had stuck in its throat ; a rest stood for the 'coo,' and it kept time with the sixth call complete. Was it an accident, or a daring bird trying to be original ?

The forest was full of cuckoos calling to each other. Most of their voices were of extraordinary richness and volume, but not two alike in tone. In the Woodman's Glade it seemed as if they were shouting through speaking-trumpets, so near and loud and full were their mellow notes. Faint and sweet the answers came on all sides, and from far within the forest, the furthest heard reply being a shadowy, echo-like 'coo.' The first half of the cuckoo's call becomes inaudible at a comparatively short distance, but the second may be heard miles away.

The itinerant had to keep to the glades and green rides ; for as soon as he went beneath a tree he was covered with caterpillars. The leaves of the pollard hornbeams and of many of the oaks were eaten away to mere skeletons ; and the sound of the myriads of caterpillars dropping from leaf to leaf, was like the patter of rain. They hung in strings when they had eaten their way down

through a tree. The itinerant counted sixteen caterpillars on one thread about a yard long : three of them were fighting—actually contending for a special half-inch of the filament to which they clung.

It was nearly seven o'clock, but the larks were still singing high overhead like violins cresting the swell of a symphony ; for finches, sparrows, blackbirds, wrens, and nightingales were loud in every tree, and the cuckoos droned melodiously over the entire forest. Gradually the performance grew less orchestral ; musician after musician fell out, and the last lark dropped breathless from the sky at half-past seven by the bell of Highbeach Church. A haze swept along the plain, and soon enveloped the forest ; yet, shrouded so, the nightingales still sang on, uninterpretable—showers of diamonds and rubies, showers of stars ; and the cuckoos pealed out their deep chest-notes calling to each other.

IV—IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

On the last day of the first half of the great drought of 1893, the itinerant, still in expectation of rain, went to Amersham. It is a question if there was any exquisite reason, or even reason sufficient, for his doing so, but to Amersham he went. He knew it to be an ancient Buckinghamshire borough, that its uncorrupted name is Agmondesham, and that as the new extension line to Aylesbury passes it, it is easily accessible from London.

Amersham station is quarter-a-mile from the town. Between them a spur of the Chilterns shuts out all signs of inhabitation, and when the itinerant came out from the offensively new booking-office into the offensively new road, that, turning an abrupt corner, seemed to lead to nowhere, he felt something very much akin to fear. Round about were low, knuckly chalk hills with

withered-looking fields, like an old profligate country in the last stage of gout ; a hot south-west wind blew across it, and the sky was sultry. The raw and glaring station, the white railway track with the grey shining lines, would vanish shortly as the train had done, and he would be left to wander about in this doleful, dying region for ever and ever. He thought he had taken a train from Baker Street to Amersham, but it was all a snare of the Evil One ; he was dead and in a circle of Hades unexplored by Dante, being unknown in his day, the leprous land appointed for the punishment of descriptive writers. Happily some good people appeared in the road ; the train then had not been a delusion, for they must have come in it also, although he had not seen them leaving the station ; one man, three women, and a girl—none of them literary people. They were evidently quite at home in the strange land, so the itinerant followed them.

By a by-path they climbed into a beech-wood, where the wind rustled and sighed in the most earthly manner imaginable, and the pale light taking an emerald tinge, filtered through the downy masses of delicate green foliage, the kindly light that has been on sea and land since the sun began to shine. The itinerant felt that he wanted never again to have anything at all to do with that 'light which *never* was on sea or land.' He thought it a stupid idea of Wordsworth's, and was in the mood to declare that the lights of sun, moon, and stars are quite sufficient for any poet; these, with that of ladies' eyes, and some wholesome midnight oil, if he likes. In the case of Wordsworth, himself, he roundly asserted to an imaginary disputant that his 'inspiration' and his 'dream' are always finest when he keeps closest to earth and its lights.

'Ah!' rejoined the imaginary disputant quite audibly, and the itinerant began to wonder if he

were not in a phantasmal region after all, 'there's a magic in Wordsworth at his best that's not of this world.'

'What nonsense!' exclaimed the itinerant. 'What paltry, unintelligent criticism! Why will you echo such commonplaces?

"Oh, who will tell me what she sings?

" Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old unhappy far-off things,
And battles long ago."

There is no more magical verse in Wordsworth than that, and it is all made out of the world—a Highland reaper, a Gaelic song, and memories of ancient times. There may have been once a kind of meaning in the "light that never was on sea or land"; but it is emptied of it now, and has become cant—a fate which has overtaken greater expressions.'

These vehement remarks silenced the itinerant's opponent, and he withdrew into the inane: there

is no one more easily overcome in argument than an imaginary disputant.

The footpath led down into Amersham, past a walled churchyard with sombre yews, and cypresses more sombre still. It was after twelve, but there were few people in the streets. Broad and clean, the main thoroughfare came short of being picturesque through want of height in the buildings. No two houses seemed of the same pattern. Shops, inns, residences, were of all ages, from the wood and plaster and projecting front of the Tudors to the red brick and immoral stone-facings of the Guelphs. With many differences in height and shape, conformity in one matter marked most of the buildings, even the newest and shoddiest. The windows had more breadth than length, and were set low in the wall, and those of the upper storey were crowded up under the eaves. This old fashion is not perhaps in itself highly æsthetic, but by contrast with the monotonous regularity of

most modern glazing it is quite beautiful. Thatch, slate, red tile, the last predominating, were no small part of the effect of variety which the town presented. Amersham is compact and airy though lying in a valley ; a very pleasant, old-fashioned little town, quite unchanged as yet by the railway. It was worth seeing ; above all, it was worth while to come suddenly on it out of the beech-wood. The itinerant came into and walked through it, before he quite realised that there was a town there.

One of the great delights of an itinerant is the half-hour in the inn when it is time to eat and drink. It may be that for a whole day the only opportunity of human converse he has is with the innkeeper or the taproom-maid—always excepting imaginary disputants—and, if he be a practised itinerant, he selects his inn carefully, supposing he has a choice ; stalks it, so to speak, and enters it with some excitement and expectation. The

choicest inn in Amersham had indeed an enticing, antique air, and the sign was of the quaintest ; so was the old innkeeper, a surly, indignant-looking person. The itinerant asked him whose whisky he kept.

INNKEEPER. My own.

ITINERANT. Oh yes, of course ! But whose ?

INNKEEPER. My own.

ITINERANT. Are you a distiller then ?

INNKEEPER. No ; but you asked me whose whisky I kept, and I said my own. It belongs to me.

The innkeeper began to look very savage ; this was evidently a standard joke of his, and it seemed as if it weren't going to come off this time. A judicious laugh, however, set matters right ; and the innkeeper without much change in his surly and indignant expression, developed a communicative and reminiscential mood ; he had a very odd appearance talking pleasantly,

with his fixed look of exasperation. Asked if he had been in Amersham all his days, he replied, No, he had lived in London for a dozen years, but had been born and brought up in Amersham.

ITINERANT. And has Amersham changed much in your day?

INNKEEPER. Not much; the streets grow a little longer by a house or two every half-dozen years, that's all. I remember, although I was only a boy at the time, when the Reform Bill of '32 was passed. People used to say then that Amersham would turn into a great place; they seemed to think that the Reform Bill was a sort of promise to pay, and they would all get money and be butchers and innkeepers and manufacturers; and Amersham would grow bigger than Aylesbury. Long after the bill was passed they came and stood about the Market Hall in the evening, waiting, you would have said, for the money to fall from the skies.

ITINERANT. Was that the Market Hall I passed a little way down the street—a curious-looking building, standing on cloisters, like a house on a bridge?

INNKEEPER. Yes; that's the Market Hall. I remember seeing an election before the Reform Bill, when the town returned two members. After it was over the members stood up on stones in front of the hall, like duxes in a school, and recited little speeches, and then drove about the town in carriages with four horses apiece. After that came the funniest thing; it was a custom here, and I saw it myself, for my father kept this inn before me. Into all the inns the women came, high and low, rich and poor, married and single; and the two members went about from inn to inn and kissed 'em every one.

ITINERANT. The election, I suppose, wouldn't have been valid unless they had done so.

INNKEEPER. Perhaps not. Anyway I saw the

members do it in the public-room of this inn. Very solemn and regular they were about it—a piece of business. And as soon as they had gone over them all, the young fellows in the town came after them, and there was such a kissing match as you never heard. I was only a boy then, and before I was old enough it was changed times.

ITINERANT. Old enough?

‘To take my share of the kissing,’ replied the innkeeper, looking more irate than ever.

The itinerant began to perceive that mechanical indignation was the only expression of which the innkeeper’s face was capable, and that his softer moods and pleasanter dispositions, as well as his dissatisfaction and annoyance, were alike rendered facially by an intensification of his habitual choleric look.

After some desultory remarks, the itinerant expressed a wish to walk about a little, and asked

the innkeeper to recommend a road. 'Go to Chesham,' said the innkeeper. 'Is it a pleasant road?' 'A good road.' 'And what is there at Chesham?' 'Woodware. They make chairs, and bats, and tennis-racquets and toy spades; brushes, too, and boots; and there's a cress ditch.'

Having never seen a cress ditch, the itinerant felt that Chesham was the place to go to. He hesitated for a moment when he learned that it was only three miles away; but although it was in the hopes of seeing rain he had come out, the sky had grown so dark, and a thunder-plump seemed so imminent that he speedily felt reconciled to the shortness of the walk.

On passing through the graveyard—he had to retrace his steps as far as Amersham station—a feature in the majority of the inscriptions struck him. They all read, 'In memory of Mr, or Mrs, or Miss So-and-So.' He had seen this curious formality in English graveyards before, but never

to such an extent. Probably the most egregious example of it is to be found in the churchyard of St Mary's, Stoke Newington, where a well-sized tomb is inscribed, 'Sacred to Miss Ellen Soames, who died on the 13th of September, 1823, aged one year and two months.'

The cloud grew blacker, and a hot clammy south-west wind blew it up from the Thames Valley.

'How soon will the rain come?' the itinerant asked of a countryman.

'Not a drop to-day,' he replied, as confidently as if he had been speaking of a thing within his own control—as if the earth had been a drunkard whom he had undertaken to keep sober.

'Leastways,' he added, 'not hereabouts.'

There being apparently neither hope nor fear of rain, the itinerant sauntered out the three miles between Amersham and Chesham to the tune of an hour and a half. It was a noble road over the roof of the land. On either side the view was

limited by an abrupt declivity ; but the itinerant felt on the very top of the world. There was no higher ground in sight ; you had only to walk half-a-mile to the left or to the right to reach the end of the earth and drop off into space. The black cloud behind grew always the heavier, and dipped and rose again. Ragged lumps of it hanging by a hair seemed about to fall out ; a dull rumble of thunder announced their downcome, but yet they were withheld. A second peal, nearer, but more reticent, indicated some kind of joke on the part of the sky. The idea seemed to be to come as near as possible to a downpour without letting a single drop fall. A third peal, louder, but still more restrained—concerned even, as if there had been a wager pending—was all the sky dared risk. Probably one drop did fall. On the whole, however, it was successful, although not fun of a very high order : like the Edinburgh editor, the laconic sky joked with difficulty.

Half-way between Amersham and Chesham, there lies a furze common. It was all in bloom, and the sober hue of the skies gave the gold of the whins a deeper tone. A shepherd's boy tended some goats and sheep that fed among the bushes; from more than one neighbouring smithy the anvils rang; and the cuckoos sounded in a beech-wood. Here were some delightful acres of old England, a little island between two railways only a mile off on either hand.

It was to see a cress ditch that the itinerant went to Chesham; but he found the town more interesting and picturesque than Amersham. The High Street contained higher buildings than the main thoroughfare of the latter town, with as much variety in style. It was not nearly so wide either; and narrowness in a street has great æsthetic value when the buildings are not imposing. As for the cress ditch, he had some

difficulty in finding it. Those people he asked were profuse in their directions, and seemed quite proud of their ditch. He began to look upon cresses as the staple of Chesham, and was somewhat dismayed when told that he had just walked past the ditch without observing it. Retracing his steps, he found, instead of the great moat he had expected, a small stream of water on one side of the road, containing forty-four baskets face downwards and tightly packed for Covent Garden; and on the other a small artificial marsh where the plant grew, occupying a portion of ground that could have been easily covered by a good-sized carpet. Doubtless it was a capital cress ditch, but the itinerant did not share the enthusiasm of the Cheshamites. He preferred their fine old church from whose tower curfew rings every night. The graveyard he found too trim and modern; but in the 'windy, tall elm

trees' beside it, crows, well up in years, and of antique lineage, uttered their husky voices regardless of the ways of men.

The itinerant had gone to the wrong county. While he walked about Buckinghamshire, rain was falling heavily in Herts; for four hours it poured at Barnet that day, and for several days after the rain was general, hardening the drought, as it happened.

PARKS AND SQUARES



PARKS AND SQUARES

I—SPRING IN LONDON

IN the end of April the itinerant tracked the Spring through London for a whole day, beginning at Waterlow Park, Highgate.

Purple irises, forests of wallflower of blood-streaked yellow or deep velvet brown, and borders of forget-me-nots, bluer than anything except the eyes of little children, filled the spaces about the lower High Street entrance. Two ill-dressed women chattering and walking quickly passed in along with the itinerant; but both paused involuntarily in their speech and gait as they plunged without warning into the invisible cloud of scent.

One of them had on some ragged finery; the clothes of the other were plainer; both, care-worn, hard-wrought women. The younger smiled in a wan way, and the tears came into the eyes of the elder. Perhaps no scent in the world is so loaded with early memories as that of the wall-flower.

It was nine in the morning, the east wind chilly, but the sky clear overhead, with smoke and haze lying towards London. Near Lauderdale House stood a dusty laurustinus, its white bloom half over; a fig-tree with the fruit already formed and sticking close to the branches; and a small orchard in which the trees began to shed their blossom.

Waterlow Park contains a deeper hollow than any other open space in London. The pond in this miniature valley is surrounded by willows drooping their green manes; by thorns that have taken some of the slope of a waterside plant and

sent out overhanging boughs; other trees have not been so accommodating. Ducks and swans sailed about and preened themselves, enjoying the cool of the morning. One little drake of a burnished black purple like iridescent ink made a great show in the presence of several admiring ducks, until a big white fellow with nothing attractive in his appearance chased him all across the pond to ignominious safety on land. Doubtless the defeated bird consoled himself with the trite reflection that the artistic temperament has always the worst of it in a combat with dullness.

Here and there were chestnut-trees, all their candles lit in their broad-leaved sconces; and in a shrubbery burned the intenser flame of a solitary laburnum. At the higher gate an exiled cedar of Lebanon threw a magnificent shade. Under all his broad shelving boughs of sombre green, dead branches were hidden and huddled together in

fantastic shapes of claws and skeletons—a gloomy secret tree that no wind stirs, moping silently.

At the higher entrance the itinerant spoke to a policeman.

ITINERANT. I suppose, like the rest of us, you never remember a spring at all like this.

POLICEMAN. No, sir. I've never seen anything like it. I've been in the way of watching trees off and on for a lot of years, and I never remember seeing the chestnuts out till the Queen's birthday.

ITINERANT. Then things are fully a month in advance.

POLICEMAN. All that. Look at that laburnum. I don't think I ever saw one so far forward till the end of May or the beginning of June.

ITINERANT. It's most astonishing weather.

POLICEMAN. It is. People don't know what to think; but they say we'll hear about it in June and July.

The itinerant went up past the old Gatehouse Tavern, and along Southwood Lane under its pollard elms, old and rugged, but crowned with green garlands. He thought of Highgate's famous days, and how Byron remembered in Bæotian Thebes that men and maids were sworn there upon the solemn horn, the oath being :—Never to drink small beer when strong was to be had unless you liked it better ; never, except by preference, to eat brown bread when you could have white, or water-gruel when turtle-soup was on the board ; never to make love to the maid when the mistress was more attractive, etc. And it seemed to him that these were rarer times than ours. People then had a more genial mood in their merry-making, possibly because they had more leisure : the haste and horror of a bank-holiday were unknown.

Along Muswell Hill Road you skirt Highgate Wood on the left ; on the right you have a broad

view of the north of London and across Middlesex into Essex. Road-making and pipe-laying were going on ; the steam-roller panted, crunched, and jangled, spreading out a heavy dressing of pebbles, kneaded up with sand and water, as a housewife would roll a covering for a pie-dish. The opposing ridge of Crouch End and Hornsey Rise limited the view from Muswell Hill towards the south, and on the north trees closed it up entirely, gardens and the wooding of Alexandra Park.

In the little orchard of the Priory the stems and boughs of the fruit-trees were painted white, against some insect doubtless ; in their shrouds of blossom with their white limbs they looked like the spirits of dead trees haunting their earthly resort ; but the rosy apple-bloom dispelled the illusion—no ghost was ever known to blush. The Priory Road leads into Hornsey High Street, with its wooden houses, its old graveyard and ivied tower ; and then across the New River and

under the Great Northern Railway you come to the long road called Green Lanes. After a mile of Green Lanes, all shorn of its trees at this part, raw and comfortless, with new buildings and new streets laid out, you reach the river gate of Finsbury Park. Cut grass floated down the New River, and small fish, olive green and silver, fed against the stream, mistaking little odds and ends for flies, and often missing the small moths that barely touched the clear green water.

In the close shrubberies of Finsbury Park, lilac of all shades grew, white like downy ostrich plumes, mauve, or lavender, or heliotrope, like ostrich plumes dyed. In the pond on the top of the hill boys rowed lazily in hired boats ; and on the seats mothers and elder sisters with babies in long frocks basked in the sun. No cloud now in the sky ; only the sun, and the moon glistening faintly—a broken filmy disc, as if Puck had caught

the sun's reflection on a magic mirror and flashed it back on the blue ceiling of heaven. From the gate at Finsbury Park Station to the Manor House the avenue of black poplars was like a way with hedges forty feet high on either side ; but the half-withered-looking leaves, yellow with a blackish tinge, suggested a double stripe of October—twin weals laid on by the sharp thong of an autumn frost.

Olissold Park, quarter-a-mile from Finsbury Park, on the road to Moorgate Street, is one of the finest in London. It is small, but the trees are lofty and well distributed. The New River flows through it in an irregular course, and there are two islanded ponds with waterfowl. The itinerant looked for the cormorant—a bird sadly out of place in artificial surroundings—which he had often watched flapping his maimed wings and fiercely refusing to look pathetic; but he was not visible. He went by Queen Elizabeth's Walk to

the old church of St Mary's, Stoke Newington, standing in the midst of its little dark graveyard. There is buried a woman with the strange name of Justina Kippist, and there the ringdoves in the maples brood and coo softly over the old-fashioned stones.

Back into Clissold Park again, he saw beside the mansion-house two laburnums, perhaps the largest about London. Although every flower had burst its sheath, there seemed to be a greenish tinge in the yellow drops, as if the sap still strove to mingle with the molten gold. In front of the house a one-sided chestnut-tree rose like a dome or a firmament studded with stars; the blossoms were stuck over it so closely that they had lost their candle-like appearance. Were the north side of this tree as shapely as the south, it would be one of the most beautiful chestnuts in England.

From Finsbury Park the itinerant went by
E

train to King's Cross. And now he began to hurry; he observed less carefully and imagined more. Is not that the effect of close streets and seething throngs?

In Brunswick Square, the lilac tossed all its lavender plumes, dusty a little, but striving to be gallant. The trees looked blighted compared with the fresher green of the northern parks, and the sky was different. No cloud or smoke was visible; only, the whole heavens seemed coated with size, through which the blue shone faint and milky. Queen Square was ragged and hunted-like. A perplexed hawthorn did its best to blossom in the once-respectable Guildford Street. Russell Square looked like a small forest. Old plane-trees, tall, with their leaves not fully formed, rose over the hollies and limes, and the dense foliage was shot through with the gold and lavender of laburnum and lilac. Woburn Square, Torrington Square, Gordon Square, Euston Square, ragged and

beggarly some of them, seemed all to throng together like a forlorn hope, in one desperate onslaught against brick and mortar—Nature, with the spring in her cap, elbowing a way through the streets of London.

The lindens in the Mall had put on all their leaves, and the plane-trees were shedding their bark. In St James's Park beds of flowers glowed beside the shining water ; chestnuts lit up gloomy spots with their dazzling candelabra ; laburnums tried in vain to hide their golden lights in the shadow of the old elms ; and the lilacs shook their gay plumes of heliotrope and mauve and lavender.

Over the Green Park the itinerant went to Rotten Row. It was an unfashionable hour. There were only a few carriages, and these mostly stationary, occupied by old ladies sunning themselves under parasols. The riders, though more numerous, were not more interesting.

Magnificent trees border the Serpentine—domes

and cones and mosques of green. In Kensington Gardens, among the finest wooding in London, the Serpentine narrows to a point, and five fountains rush and gurgle and sparkle in a liquid chorus beside two large nymphs holding vases and seated on small swans. As the itinerant walked along slowly, with nobody about, and the water popping, crackling, and splashing, through the nearer music of the fountains came the deep sound of London, and there danced before his eyes a vision of the wonderful spring of 1893, marching through the city in green robes, with nodding plumes of lilac, and a great retinue of laburnums bearing lanterns, and chestnuts swinging tapers in their hundred arms.

II—HAMPTON COURT PARK

Hampton Court Park is a pleasance of avenues. The affectation which lurks in this definition is wholly suitable, for the park is itself an affectation.

Nature's gait has here been ordered by a prim law, and her features brought into a fixed smile. When these rows of trees were first planted, they must have looked very ridiculous—like a free-limbed hoyden suddenly borne up by a posture-master. But age and custom have withered away the acquired stiffness of their youth, and made stale with an infinite variety of individual bulk and outline their linear disposition. There seems to be no wilfulness of man which Nature is unable to adopt—great-hearted, artistic, non-moral, nothing to her is illegitimate; of the academic affectation of Hampton Court Park she has made with time and leisure, a bland and gracious don who is also a man of the world. Or the affectation has become so extravagant as to be sublime. Scratch a Russian, and you find a Calmuck; but you would require to cut down these lofty elms, leaving only rows of stumps, before their mathematical arrangement would offend.

On Whit-Monday, 1893, the first day of the freedom of Hampton Court Home Park, the public seemed but little interested in their new pleasure-ground. Comparatively few visitors entered by the little gate at Hampton Wick, while the palace entrance was thronged all day. Until well on in the afternoon, more than a dozen people were seldom visible at a time in the avenues and spaces of the park proper, and most of these were walking through at a business-like pace to the gardens and pictures of the palace. One or two lounged and watched, contented with the ease and breadth of the green turf and the green trees, and entertained by the brilliant manœuvres of the summer sunshine which moved about the park in deep squares and silent regiments, detaching troops in single files to explore the elm-tree shades, or to lie in careless ambush gleaming among the oaks and chestnuts. White clouds inlaid the blue sky; the sun shone as if through a burning-glass; and a

south-west wind blew fitfully. Outside, marching along the highway to Hampton, a secular band passed, playing 'The Rose of Annandale'—very charming to those who remember it from the time they were children : pearls can be made out of dust and ashes, and memory on a holiday can adorn the paltriest tune.

The north avenue, three-quarters of a mile long, leads from Hampton Wick to the palace, and this was the favourite approach for those visitors who left the train at Kingston. On the pathway, the light was spilt in splashes and pools, in drops and showers. Sometimes it reached only the upper branches of the trees ; sometimes the overarching boughs were so interwoven that no light came through, except a dusky glow tinged with the green of the filtering leaves : a lofty aisle, six furlongs in length, full of light and shade, sighing and echoing to the warm south-west.

Through the palace gardens and through the

palace the people came and went in thousands, the ground before the east front being the favourite promenade and lounge. They formed little eddying groups about a sandstone Samson or Hercules tearing asunder the jaws of a sandstone lion; they stood three deep round the pond watching the shifting rainbow on the wind-blown fountain, and the lazy gold-fish of aldermanic bulk; they rested in companies and families and pairs, under the dense shade of the yews, dark old trees that, like the cedar of Highgate, rustle to no wind, hugging strange secrets in their close arms; or they admired the crescent plots and diamond-beds of flowers, geraniums and forget-me-nots, like damasks and brocades spread on the lawns to take the sun and wind. Some haunted the banks of the long canal-like stretch of water, watching the white cups of the lilies open slowly among their broad leaves, and catching glimpses of the azure dragon-flies that glanced athwart and along

like elfin shuttles weaving of the sunbeams and the air an invisible fabric, an enchanted coverlet for the water in its mossy bed.

In the palace a perpetual stream of people rolled and murmured through the wilderness of pictures. Babbling, chattering, laughing, men, women, and children, with hurried glances, pushed along the rooms and corridors, or sat on the broad window-sills, commenting on each other. Strange amid this tramp and hubbub to speculate on the dubious Da Vincis and Titians—the ‘Flora’ with moonflowers and sunlight in her copper-coloured hair, with a smiling secret in her eyes, but too much laughter and promise in her mouth; the ‘Lucrece’ with hidden face, sheathing ‘in her harmless breast, a harmful knife,’ an exquisite but almost melodramatic figure. As the itinerant walked through the courtyards and round the palace, the buzz and murmur issuing from every wide open window seemed to him like that of a

gigantic public school : the house which the despotic king took from the despotic cardinal has passed to the democracy growing despotic.

Without the palace gates, a fine vulgar bustle and hurly-burly roared and rumbled. Hampton Green was turned into a skipping-rope rink, with troops of giggling, screaming girls ; and a compact fair bordered it. An endless succession of vehicles bowled past to Kempton Park races ; throngs jostled across the bridge in clouds of dust ; boys and men and women bellowed through toy trumpets, and those who were without trumpets screeched the chorus of a popular song ; cries and laughter came from the river ; high above the riot larks with sinewy wings soared out of sight, showering their diamond notes ; the sun went west in a golden haze, and near the zenith the moon glistened faintly, as if the Thames had caught the sun's reflection and flashed it on the sky.

III—ST JAMES'S PARK

In June a water-weed clogged the preserved portion of the lake in St James's Park. It grew up from the bottom, stringy, slimy, lumpy, and its spongy crests swayed in thousands on the top of the lake, like green snow carted and cast in to melt. The long drought and heat had produced this weed—a fever in the thin and wholesome water. Plenty of rain dissolves it; but it had assumed such dimensions that it had to be lifted out. At the foot of a bent and limb-lopped black poplar, the itinerant saw a heap of it lying like wet bundles of green crape.

In a part of the park bordering the Mall, a hundred loafers were stretched at their length under the sultry sky, mostly face down, as if ashamed—human lumber, self-constituted, or, in rare cases, by other circumstances than self. The itinerant felt inclined to cry out to them, 'Awake!

arise! or be for ever lumber! Know that each one of you is the main circumstance in his own life; that every man who is overcome is self-defeated, let him blame whom or what he may. Get up! Do something—if it were only to fight among yourselves, and find out who is the strongest.' But the visible faces were not intelligent.

No great percentage of these loafers, as far as the itinerant could see, were vicious-looking; none of them seemed over thirty; strong and healthy, they would have made capital ploughmen, labourers, or soldiers. On the other side of the park, in Wellington Barracks, recruits were being drilled; and the itinerant, in fear and trembling, lest a bird of the air should carry it to some economist or other well-informed person, whispered to himself, 'A press-gang would be the best plan for a large proportion of the unemployed. Surely, as a beginning of reform in the matter, and as a

temporary measure which would tend always to make itself unnecessary, no one could object to the compulsory enlistment of every able-bodied man who cannot find work: Wellington Barracks is cheerier than a Union.' He would have pursued the question much further, but his terror of doctrinaires and people with fixed ideas is so great, that he banished the subject from his mind; not, however, before he had seen an analogy between the water-weeded lake, and society with the unemployed curdling its blood.

'If,' he said to himself, rashly taking up the subject again, after having abandoned it, 'if society grows stagnant with the unemployed, and no great deluge of commercial prosperity comes to wash away the disease, then you must, with some pitch-fork or other, clear out your lake that it may not fester. You see—' But at that moment a Member of Parliament who passed divined clearly what the itinerant was thinking, and cast the first stone at

him with his eye ; and the itinerant pulled himself together and began to study the ducks.

The lake was shrill with the piping of newly-hatched ducklings, no bigger than sparrows. Callow, with bills as soft as flesh, and the hearts of vultures, they darted about the water at a surprising speed, and in the highest of spirits. Providence, in the shape of children and nursemaids, was busy doling out crumbs ; but that seemed stale food to many of the fluffy little brutes. More tempting game allured them—live game, and on the wing. The intense absorption in the pursuit of moths and flies displayed by some of these week-old creatures was wonderful. And not only their devotion to sport at that early age excited the itinerant's admiration, but also the skill and finesse they displayed in pursuit of their prey. They turned right round in full career, shot off at right-angles, leapt bodily out of the water, flapping their lamb-chop wings, turned in the air,

twisted their bills round, and snapped up flies behind their own backs. Their heavy-bodied fathers and mothers, quite unable to perform such feats, looked on in amazement, much as human parents might if a year-old infant were to don a pair of skates, and proceed at once to cut spread-eagles and figure-eights, and score its own name, hardly dry yet in the registrar's book.

Sparrows, tamer than pigeons, hopped among the children's feet ; three gloomy cormorants, one on a clog and two on a rail, a triangular moping party, sat in their appointed place with their heads on one side and their beaks pointing with the wind ; a pair of black storks went scavenging about on their artificial-looking legs ; and two or three water-fowl rose now and again and circled the pond with harsh cries.

Yellow irises shone among the flags. Winding over the shrub-crowned undulations of the park were long borders of purple and white lupins, wall-

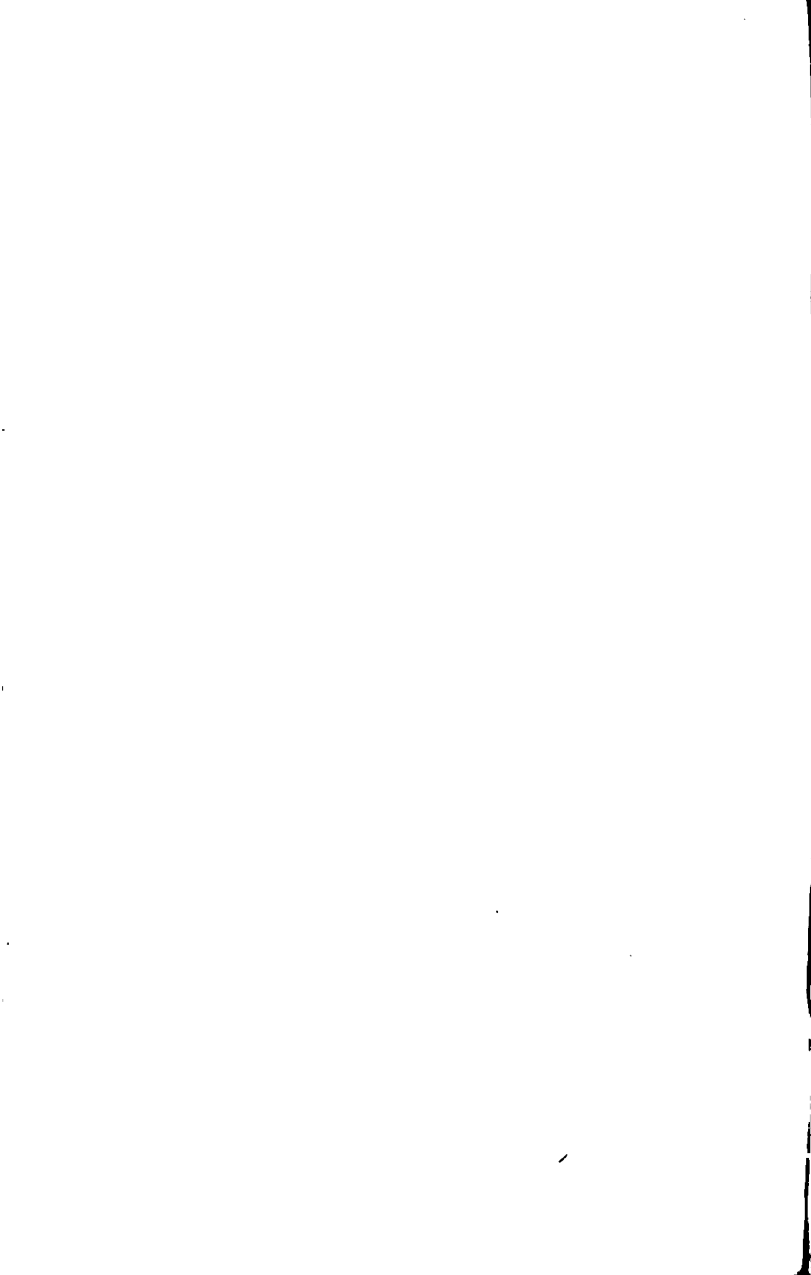
flower, streaked and pied, crimson and pink geraniums—ribbons and scarfs of many colours setting off the masses of green. The broad-leaved plane-trees shedding their bark, the limes and the lofty elms, swelled into cushions and mounds, and rose into mosques and domes and peaks of foliage, or looked in the still, brooding air like green clouds waiting for a wind to bear them away.

An opal upper sky was visible through the holes and meshes of the lower stretch of lace-like texture—antique lace, torn and faded, of a delicate saffron here and there, trailed and dipped in the wine-cups of many a forgotten sunset.

Steadily the itinerant kept his gaze on the sky as he left the park: he would not think of the fever in the lake, of the human lumber on one side, and of the Wellington Barracks on the other.

A SUBURBAN TOUR

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A SUBURBAN TOUR

I—BY THE LEA

AT the foot of Turnpike Lane, which runs between Hornsey High Street and Green Lanes, a path leads over Mount Pleasant to Tottenham. In the whole circuit of London, within the six-mile radius, there is no broader and freer view to be had than that from the Tottenham Mount Pleasant. Green Lanes exhibits the suburbanity of the London suburb in all its stages : raw fields, trenched, and littered with bricks ; raw terraces, red and yellow, newly tenanted ; rawer terraces, red and yellow, waiting for tenants ; one or two

forlorn old houses ; groups of trees, fragments of hedges, stray coffee-stalls, and a car line. In three minutes, the itinerant had left it all, and stood on the top of Mount Pleasant, among high elms that caught the wind, looking across fields of cattle, fields of buttercups, and miles of wooded country, new spires and old church-towers aglow in the veiled sunlight. The sky, a dome, ceiled in mosaic of blue, grey, and smoked porcelain, hung near the earth. Rain threatened all forenoon, but the north-east wind toiling along slowly, lifted the clouds up and away over London : very slowly, not till the early afternoon did the sky-porter manage to lug his voluminous burden of vapour over St Paul's and Westminster towards Surrey and the sea.

In Tottenham, the itinerant asked the way to the Lea, and started a man on a bitter complaint about the Tottenham water-supply.

‘The pressure’s only 1 lb., and the New River

has 5 lb. pressure. And it's muddy; they don't cheat us; it's Lea water, with plenty of body. There's only one old lift-pump down in the Lea there. Sometimes for days there's no supply in the houses at all; men come round with carts and hand out the water in jugs; fact. Oh, you've no idea—none; you might as well be camping in the desert.'

This highly-indignant person's directions to find the Lea were not very luminous, and the itinerant made no attempt to follow them, being in no hurry to leave Tottenham. High old dwelling-houses; hoary old almshouses; the Duchess of Somerset's grammar-school; and the High Cross, somewhat too carefully renovated lately, but beloved of Isaak Walton, make Tottenham a pleasant place to loiter in.

At last the itinerant met a schoolboy whom he judged to be playing truant, from his aspect of mingled enterprise and conspiracy.

‘Hulloa!’ he cried. ‘Which is the shortest way to the Lea?’

‘I’ll show you,’ replied the schoolboy, reproving by his glance and whispered accents the itinerant’s boisterous tone. Looking round heedfully, like an Indian scout, he pointed to a fence and said, ‘Go over there and follow the railway till you come to the river.’

Before the itinerant had time to thank him, the schoolboy was off down a lane at the top of his speed. Perhaps he had seen his father or his elder sister. Probably he was not playing truant, but only in a hurry. The hey-day of truant-playing has long been past, they say. Quarter-a-century ago boys used to be able to ‘plug’ or ‘trunch’ (Strathclyde words) the school for weeks at a time, but the school-board officer has made such long spells of fearful joy impossible. What interest can life have for hardy boys if they are unable to play truant?

'Sir,' replied the imaginary disputant, 'for once I agree with you. The tendency to treat children like captives who must be watched and herded is bad. If the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had been kept in an iron cage, our first parents, being without files, couldn't have fallen, and having nothing to worry about, would have remained in their original state of stupidity. So if schools are made prisons, from which escape is impossible, boys having no choice, their will-power is atrophied, and you can never have a Olive or a Warren Hastings again.' There was some glimmer of sense in the imaginary disputant's remarks, but the itinerant questioned in silence if it was more *worry* that schoolboys needed.

The boy's direction was as right as it could be, and the itinerant came out on the west bank of the Lea at South Tottenham. A muddy enough stream it looked: free from sewage, however; bordered by sedges, and rowed on by pleasure

boats. Spectral poplars stood up in the distance ; nearer, some pollard willows, like rude and savage wood-nymphs with their hair on end, stared and nodded their heads at the young man rowing his sweetheart, and the athlete skimming along in his frail shell of splinters. The itinerant followed the towing-path towards London ; passed an eyot with swans ; and crossed by a bridge to the east bank and Leyton Marsh.

Leyton Marsh is a fine inch with no traces of wet-land ; the portion of it nearest the river, treeless and crossed by a railway ; yet its broad pastoral look was undeniable. Opposite, another Mount Pleasant, with trees and old houses, sloped to the river.

A little further on is Lea Bridge, a riverside village, huddled together on the east bank in a quaint, indifferent way. At Lea Bridge wharf sweltered a great riparian caudle of things : an accumulation of bricks, gravel, carts, wheel tyres,

heaps of manure, dilapidated sheds, a barge being overhauled, with much steaming of tar, in a dry dock, and another barge from Llandudno discharging bricks. The whole simmered in a pungent atmosphere of smoke and stale water; resounded with the traffic that rolled over the bridge; and for a moment grew plaintive with the bleating of a flock of sheep which passed across to feed in the marsh.

At Lea Bridge are two taverns, 'The Ship Aground,' kept by H. J. Marvell, and 'The Jolly Anglers,' kept by Posh Price. The itinerant chose 'The Jolly Anglers,' and the first thing he saw on entering was a prize-belt hanging on a shelf, with a card beneath, announcing that it had been presented to Posh Price, an undefeated middle-weight. Mr Price, unfortunately, was not at home, but the itinerant liked his inn very much. It was a picture-gallery of the ring. Photographs and engravings of prize-fighters, backers, bottle-

holders, referees, and coloured prints of prize-fights covered the walls of every compartment. Captain Baker, Heenan, and Pierce Egan were among the photographs, and many another sporting gentleman as large as life in very tall chimney-pot hats and roll collars. Notable among the engravings, was one inscribed: 'The great contest between Sayers and Heenan. The fight, for £200 a-side and the championship, lasted two hours and six minutes, and resulted in a draw. Fought near Farnborough on the 17th April, 1860.' Here was a date the itinerant had never known before, if nothing else! There was also a picture of the 'great contest' between Jim Mace and Tom King. Outside, at green tables, sat two or three close-cropped worthies drinking beer and eating lunches out of newspapers. In front was the river with boats to hire, the wharf to the right, and to the left a dense grove of poplars, black and white, growing on a peninsula, shrinking together as if they had no

business to be there, and rustling apologetically in the wind.

Hackney Marsh is an island surrounded by the Lea proper, or Back River as it is called, and by a canal called the New River, which runs for two miles between Lea Bridge and Oldford. The marsh lies low, but no portion of it the itinerant saw could be called marsh-land. A Yankee in a straw hat assured him, however, that ten years ago it was flooded; and people in Clapham and Homerton, over the river there, took their breakfasts in boats one morning; 'plenty of water, but no tea.' What this Yankee meant by loafing on the banks of the Back River and emitting information about London, with the ease and certainty of a gazetteer, was not made plain. The itinerant mentioned that it was his intention to go round London, keeping about the six-mile radius. The Yankee hoped he would like it; for his part, he preferred to walk in the country. That was his

sole response to the itinerant's frankness. He then talked of what was to be done with the Marsh now that it had become public property; referred to disputed rights-of-way, and mentioned his great-grandfather, who had lived in Kent. But of what he did there, airing his Yankee drawl on Hackney Marsh, he gave no hint.

Cows, horses, ponies, fed and galloped over the wide plain; a single house, old, white-washed, rambling, licensed, stood among trees; larks sang over the land. Hackney Marsh has an unreclaimed free look about it greatly attractive to the wandering instinct.

The itinerant followed the canal, and noted a drake and three ducks ascending it in Indian file. The wind was against them as well as the stream, and they made but slow progress hugging the shore. At last the drake with a flirt of his wings gave it up and landed; but the ducks paddled about. They were all pure white as to their

feathers, but no two of them had bills of the same hue; the four bills made a gamut of yellow, ascending from the deepest orange to the lightest lemon-colour.

In an outlet, which ran for some distance parallel with the artificial channel, some boys were fishing with a handkerchief. They sat on a low wall, their feet resting on the bed of the channel, until a fish appeared. Then a pair of them stretched the handkerchief slackly under the water, and tried to lift the fish out as it passed up. As patient and silent as herons, these boys deserved better success than they seemed to be having.

Sheds, wharfs, and manufactories began to be continuous on the opposite shore. The itinerant was now in Oldford, and there he saw the only barge actually navigating the Lea that day. It was towed by a carriage-horse fallen on evil days, and contained a cargo of shot rubbish. The

crew consisted of a man at the bow and another at the helm. The itinerant hailed the steersman.

‘Where away!’

‘Ponder’s End.’

‘To fill up: road-making!’

‘No; manure.’

Old baskets, tin corners, paper, and other matter, which the earth is supposed to find somewhat indigestible, were conspicuous ingredients in this load of manure. But the itinerant, being a Scotchman, thought to himself, ‘This is London; and surely in a place where people eat turnip-tops and eels, the soil may manage to make something of a meal of old baskets and paper, garnished with tin corners.’

At Oldford was the only actual piece of marshland. It lay lower than the Lea, and the stream that drained into it was crossed by a very small ruined bridge of brick. A gusset of slime, guarded on one side by relays of jangling trains, on another

by the river embankment, and on the third by tall chimney-stalks belching smoke, it had a most woe-begone and horrible aspect—a piece of nature, imprisoned for years, diseased, and almost irre-cognisable with filth and foul air.

Near Oldford station is a lock, and there the old and the new rivers join. Intent on reaching the mouth of the Lea, the itinerant asked a waterman about the way. The waterman had much natural eloquence, and made quite a speech about the matter. He had evidently the clearest conception of how the itinerant ought to go, with equally clear conceptions of the many ways he ought not to go : all these conceptions struggled to get uttered at one and the same time, and, in the end, after a great expenditure of words and gesture, the waterman declared there was no use attempting to explain it, because the itinerant couldn't possibly understand it. In his flow of ideas and language he misused and mispro-

nounced words frequently. All that the itinerant had to do was never to mind 'all these tribities and outlets which there are a mess of 'em here-about; but you keep straight on the road you're going until you can go no further, and that's a bridge which takes you into Bow. Then you keep along to the left and take the—one, two, three—take the fourth on the right, and go on till you come to Canning Town. Then you go across the Iron Bridge and down by the East India Dock into Orchard Place, and there you'll find the extermination of the Lea. Now, will you remind that?' The itinerant said he was certain to, and escaped with difficulty, while the waterman sent his eloquence after him in the most cheerful manner as long as he was within hearing.

A barge discharging tar, a barge discharging mud, and a soap-work were the most impressive objects for the next part of the way. Every

separate pore of the air seemed to be impregnated with a distinct and astonishingly offensive odour, and reaches of the river were enamelled from side to side with a gleaming coat of many colours in which gold was dominant. The insane artist had used mud as his medium, swept up his whole palette, and dashed it on without purpose or pattern—having had indeed no time to paint a picture, as his moving canvas slipped past. The itinerant went rapidly through that dreadful region. Arriving at the waterman's bridge, he left the river and found himself in the High Street of Stratford-atte-Bowe.

Stratford is the most disorganised part of London. Here and there the Lea appears with foul wharfs and coal barges ; raw places, old unhealed abrasions open up with sheep like maggots starving in them ; gasometers are visible at the foot of every street on one side of the highway, and there is a smell of misery in the wind. The itinerant

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derived much comfort from an advertisement on a yard. It ran : '1,000,000 old bricks for sale.' He thought of the time when this ugly Stratford-atte-Bowe would come to an end, when the New Zealander would stick up such another advertisement at the Tidal Basin, opposite Bugsby's Reach, which may be called the gate of London. How many millions of millions of bricks there must have gone to build up London! Man is your only true ant and coral insect. What a pot of money that New Zealand broker will make who buys up London—takes it off somebody's hands at his own price, and sells it in lots as old bricks!

The itinerant fled by train from Stratford to Canning Town, and picked up the Lea again at the Iron Bridge. Here small groups were interested in the operations of pile-drivers beginning a new viaduct across the Lea for the gas-mains; and here the itinerant beheld a sight more interesting than any other he saw that day. It was

a glass hearse returning from a burial. The end was open, and on the floor where the coffin had lain within the hour three comrades of the dead man were stretched at their ease smoking. Crowds passed to and fro on the bridge, yet no one save the itinerant took special notice of the hearse. The mourners were quite unconscious of anything unseemly in their conduct, and so was the driver, who, by the way, wore top-boots. The men had on clean jackets and caps of tweed or blue cloth; their faces and hands were also clean; but they retained their working trousers and boots. Poor Tom or Ned had died; they had followed his body to the grave, seen it decently interred, and then got into the hearse themselves as the quickest way back to their work. Gravely they smoked, lying where the coffin had lain, with their own thoughts doubtless. There was no bravado about it, and it was evidently nothing unusual down Blackwall way.

Through the closed gate of the Lea-mouth Entrance Wharf the itinerant caught a glimpse of the Lea ending its chequered career in the Thames. The neighbourhood was deserted, but a postman spoke to him of his own accord—a travelled postman, who had fallen down a dock in Adelaide, and more recently into the Lea at Bow. He mentioned these facts as if they had been traits of character, and pointed out, among the high walls of the docks, an isolated block of dwelling-houses round which a drunk man once trudged all night supposing himself to be going straight home: the postman evidently thought that for this, this chiefly, if not this alone, the London Docks are celebrated.

II—FROM THE ISLE OF DOGS TO SYDENHAM

Leaving the station at Canning Town in the early afternoon, the itinerant turned from the direct route to the Isle of Dogs, lured by a market-

like bustle in the Victoria Dock Road. If one is abroad for the purpose of looking about it is difficult to resist mingling in any concourse of people that has the appearance of a fair; and if one is at all subject to the influence of crowds, it is equally difficult to avoid buying where everybody who is not taking money is spending it. All along the north side of the Victoria Dock Road a close rank of stalls, set up at the edge of the pavement, fronts the shops daily. Many of them are simply extensions of the shops; some are rivals. The passage along the pavement is slow, for the throng is great, and moves both up and down; and trade is brisk. Shell fish, dry fish, wet fish, much stale fish; meat, sweet stuff, green stuff; slops, underclothing, cloth of all kinds; tools, gear, tackle of every description, find purchasers in ragged children, bare-headed women, unshaved men—sailors, dockers, loafers.

Something the itinerant was bound to buy too.

He stopped at a crossing, where a man was selling books out of a bag—a man, whose nose, thrust aside in the battle of life, made fruitless efforts to sneeze some admonition into his left ear. When the itinerant, being on the whole the most respectable-looking person there, joined his audience the walking bookseller put away whatever he was trying to sell, and diving into his sack produced a book bound in faded velvet.

‘Is it lit’ratoor you want?’ he said; ‘good lit’ratoor? If there’s anybody here as holds that good lit’ratoor isn’t worth its price, I’d like him to prove it by refusing me four-and-six for this volum’ of po’try—Tennyson, bound in purple velvet.’

He opened the book and held it up open: it was clearly *not* Tennyson.

‘Four-and-six for the late Lowreate’s works in purple velvet. No? Well, I’ll tell you wot I’ll do, as I want to encourage the sale of genooiin’

lit'ratoor. I'll take a shilling ; I'll take sixpence ;
I'll take twopence.'

The itinerant gave him the coppers.

'Sold again ! I like a man wot knows a good book when he sees it, an's willing to give a fair price for a fair article.'

The velvet-covered book was lined inside with white, watered silk. The fly-leaf bore this inscription in faded ink : 'Rebecca King, presented by Mrs Chandler as token (*sic*) of respect. September, 11th, 1860.' And this was the title-page : 'A ROVER'S TALE. By an Officer of the British Army. Paris : printed by J. Smith, 1843.' The following couplet in very small type appeared in the middle of the page :

'Come forth, ye visions of my heated brain,
Blaze on the world, nor rest in smothered pain !'

The poem, of two cantos, with arguments and notes, was in rhyming pentameters, arranged in nine-lined but non-Spenserian stanzas. Opening

it at the end the itinerant read the penultimate verse :

‘ And now the Rover ceases his rude chants.
May you unwearied ponder o’er his scenes !
What charm has poetry which kindly grants
Remission from all labour, supervenes
The need of travel : such should be the aim
Of bards who fain would make their poesies sweet ;
Our Rover strives to gain a modest fame,
Trusting his rhymes some useful end may meet,
But till he learns result conceals his name.’

Clearly, an acquisition : a brother itinerant who had recorded his journeyings in remarkable rhymes exactly fifty years ago ; a velvet-bound, silk-lined book, sold for twopence as the works of Tennyson in the Victoria Dock Road by a squint-nosed walking bookseller who probably couldn’t read. It would furnish some entertainment if the way grew tedious; and the itinerant pocketed it with satisfaction.

From the Victoria Dock Road he passed into the East India Dock Road. Much traffic rolled along, vehicular and passenger—the latter confined almost entirely to the residential side of the street.

The itinerant took the dock side, and about the only living thing he met until he came to Robin Hood Lane, was a Highland beetle, leisurely stepping across the pavement—taking a constitutional the itinerant judged from the freedom and carelessness of his gait. The itinerant perceived him to be a Highland beetle because while his head and thorax were clad in dark mail, he wore upon the hind part of his body, which was more than half-an-inch long, a tight-fitting dress of shepherd tartan. He was in all likelihood a rove-beetle, but the itinerant had too great a respect for his person, he was such an independent little fellow, to tickle him up in order to see him stand at bay with his jaws agape and his tail on end.

By Robin Hood Lane, the Causeway, and Poplar High Street he came to the West India Docks. These bound the Isle of Dogs on the north, Blackwall Reach on the east, Greenwich Reach on the south, and Limehouse Reach on the

west. The shore is occupied by wharfs, yards, and manufactories of many kinds—bridge-building, ship-building, chemical works, etc. Within these again, a second zone, is the highway, which under the names of Preston's Road, Manchester Road, West Ferry Road, and Millwall Ferry Road, sweeps round from Poplar High Street on the east to join it again on the west.

The general impression left on the itinerant by the Isle of Dogs is that of a Scotch town on Sunday. In the neighbourhood of the West India Docks there are a number of tumble-down houses and an aspect of decay and dirt, and towards the south a noise of manufacturing usurps the air; but about Millwall Dock, which occupies the centre of the isle, the streets, for the most part new, are clean, comparatively wide, and, when the itinerant was there, almost deserted. The only vehicle he saw for fully a quarter of a mile was a watering-cart; and the only people who seemed

to be abroad were the rent-collectors—an unfortunate race doomed to carry black bags and to wrangle from door to door. Masts and bowsprits appeared at the ends of cross-streets in an unaccountable way; here was a little boulevard, there a market-garden; two handsome churches and two gigantic board-schools occupied conspicuous sites; the hot air shimmered on the roasting flags and on the brick walls of silent yards and houses, that dozed and blinked at the cool shadow on the opposite side of the street. Overhead all was clear except for a few scattered cloudlets of snowy whiteness, as if the Crab, in whose power the sun would shortly be, had splashed a little foam about the sky.

Suddenly the Sabbath stillness of the streets was broken by the sound of a barrel-organ—one of the old-fashioned hurdy-gurdies of which so few are to be heard now. The blind organ-man was grinding out the Old Hundredth. There was an-

other in the street besides the itinerant whose childhood was recalled by the sound. A faded young woman, much of a slattern, with a child at her knee and another in her arms, trailed round a corner and rested against a wall. It was plain from her expression that the tune had an old meaning for her. To the itinerant it recalled summer holidays at Rothesay in 1867. During July of that year the Port-Bannatyne Road was haunted by an organ-grinder with a long white beard and an antique beaver hat of lofty build. His instrument, worn and shrill, but not wheezy—they made these things, like many others, better long ago—had its full complement of tunes; but he kept the Old Hundredth stop on all evening often. The hurdy-gurdy had become a part of himself. He had taught it to express his own mood; no one before or since could convey so much meaning in the turning of a crank. Consider how slight the connection between the

pipes he sounded and his own mind! Yet by some sorcery he sent his fancy and feeling into every note of the Old Hundredth. When you went rock-cod fishing, as the sun set in purple and gold, and a late steamer struck magical founts of silver out of the dusky crimson water, the slow tune escaping from the crowd and hum of the road, took heart and swelled and shook over the bay, a triumphant dirge for the departing sun. Wandering through the wood in search of rasps—that wood, where in July those happiest of modern pagans, the Glasgow Fair folk, sleep in hundreds at the sign of the evening star—you could hear the tune stealing through the trees, loaded with memories of church bells and of Sabbath mornings when the organ-man was young, and sang ‘All people that on earth do dwell’ from the same book with his sweetheart. Or it soared into the air and reached the listener on the brow of the Castle Hill—great, simple music, a fit mate

for the mountains of Argyleshire and the broad firth. Sometimes the old man played quickly, haunted by remorse, the Old Hundredth then sounding like a devil's mass; sometimes he put such a depth of reconciliation into it that it became the 'best comforter to an unsettled fancy,' and Bute a new isle of Prospero.

In the Isle of Dogs, the least enchanted of all the British Isles, this tune which throbs in the blood of every Scotchman, conjured up these memories and more. The other listener, the faded girl-mother with the two children, grew paler and more desperate-looking; but when the Old Hundredth which had recalled her childhood ceased and 'A che la morte' began, she wept behind her baby. Perhaps she had heard 'Il Trovatore' in the town-hall of her native place with her husband when he was courting her and their hopes were high, before the world went against them, and the docks were their only refuge.

The itinerant found that the building of the Great Eastern was still a great tradition in the Isle of Dogs. The Scott-Russell yard was pointed out with pride, and so was the Great Eastern Tavern. A casual cicerone seemed, indeed, hardly certain that the Great Eastern Railway was not a namesake of the famous vessel.

Within the last twenty years the character of the interior of the Isle of Dogs has changed entirely. Formerly it consisted of market-gardens, and the worst slums within the metropolitan area ; now the market-gardens are nearly all built on, and the streets are as already described.

Nothing passed either up or down — a rare thing on the Thames—when the itinerant crossed at Greenwich Ferry. During the brief three minutes' passage he noticed and thought only of the breeze, and vowed to visit the Thames often if the semi-tropical weather lasted : it seems to be the only highway the wind frequents in London

summers. Greenwich was dull with negrominstrels, bird-exhibitors, and shrimp-sellers in numbers out of all proportion to the few visitors, Greenwich Palace, four square piles of building, a commodious design, had, in the strong sunshine, a double share of that washed-out look which characterises old stone buildings in London and its environs. Along the wood wharf there was scarcely any traffic ; some barges were discharging straw and deals, but as indolently as if the cattle and people who were to use them were not yet born. The itinerant tried to reach the mouth of the Ravensbourne which falls into the Thames at Greenwich, but found it impossible without taking boat. On the bridge which crosses the top of Deptford Creek—the portion of the Ravensbourne affected by the tide—enough of it was visible to satisfy the greatest devotee of watercourses. The tide was out, and a dirty, ropy puddle trickled through a broad winding moat filled with mud.

Deep in this viscous iridescent slime big barges stuck engulfed to the rudder's shoulder as if they grew there like gigantic odd-shaped mushrooms. The itinerant asked a workman if these three-quarter buried hulks would float with the tide. He assured him they would—he saw it daily, indeed ; but it was hard to believe.

The banks of the Ravensbourne were inaccessible between Greenwich and Lewisham, and, as much of the way lay along narrow paths between high walls and fences, the itinerant glanced at his velvet-bound book. Anything read attentively while one is walking acquires a peculiar vividness and importance, and the itinerant soon became persuaded that 'The Rover's Tale' was the absurdest and most amusing poem ever written ; but the passages marked do not now seem so irresistibly funny as they did on the road to Sydenham. The first verse, devoutly intended as an heroic introduction, is typical of the whole.

' Not in that frozen climate of the North
(Where blood runs cold as ice-encumbered stream)
Did this our Rover on drear earth come forth.
No—he was born where Eastern jackals scream,
Where Hindoos worship gods of wood and stone,
Where Moslem conquerors conquered cease to rule,
Where mountains seem to pierce high heaven's throne—
There was his birthplace, in such Eastern school
Some years he passed, then left his mother own.'

To this stanza there are three notes, one of them pointing out that 'in India are some of the highest mountains in the world.' The Rover's notes are a great feature; they average one for every stanza. Vanity and ineptitude can go no further than in the annotation to the following lines. Speaking of Creole dames the 'Rover' says—

' They are right beauteous; sadly does one think
That such a beauty like a rose doth pass,
When gathered left in sun, its bloom will sink,
Changing to faded sweetness.'

Upon the last clause the egregious comment is—'The author acknowledges to have stolen this image from "Orlando Furioso."' No verse is

without its ridiculous turn ; no note without its platitude. In sincerity, naïveté, unconscious humour, and unflagging good-will, although not in literary merit, 'The Rover's Tale' recalls 'The Adventures of John Bunce,' Amory's extraordinary book, the memory of which is kept alive by Hazlitt's essay.

In the car from Lewisham to Catford, and as he walked over Perry Hill and up Sydenham Road to the station, the itinerant neglected the scenery he had come out to see, and followed the Rover on his aimless wanderings in India and Europe—for he managed to obtain leave of absence after all.

'Kind Nature helped him, *though the Board refused ;*
Malignant illness brought the Rover low,
And he had died had they not then infused
Fresh life into him ; they no more veto ;
They saw he must die, unless dear home could
Restore unto his cheek a healthful bloom.
The Hygeian goddess oft in vain is wooed ;
But he was young, Fate had not oped his tomb,
And fav'ring Fortune was in happy mood.'

That is an exquisite turn, worthy of immortality, 'though the Board refused.' 'The Rover's Tale' is not the most amusing poem the itinerant ever read, but he really thinks it is the most absurd.

III—FROM SYDENHAM TO BARNES

The scanty showers that fell towards the end of May only sprinkled the earth, dedicating it to a fiercer trial. By midsummer London and its suburbs baked for weeks in the dry beams of the solstice-nearing sun, were supersaturated with heat, which, reverberating from brick and clay, from streets, wooden or asphalted, from dusty highways and parched commons, shimmered to the sky.

On the morning of one of the last days of the great drought, as the itinerant, resuming his journey round London, walked over West Hill and past the Crystal Palace, the sun, fire-new, heart-

less and unhuman, burst out of a jungle of clouds. The brilliant beauty and strength and perfect performance of all its functions of a tiger in its prime are most admirable ; but there is no earthly creature so handsome, so instinctive, so indifferent, so fated, as the ' gaudy, blabbing, and remorseless ' sun. The itinerant marked him climb the ' steep up heavenly hill,' and thought how it depended on the accident of a little rain whether the autumn world would be a blister or a harvest ; and as he watched the swift effortless ascent towards the zenith, and remembered that a thin veil of vapour was all that ever lay between us and famine, he marvelled that the race of men should have endured so long.

'But what belated thoughts are these?' whispered the imaginary disputant. ' Shall we never be done with this Pre-Copernicanism ? Allow me to assure you once more that the sun is a stationary sleeping top—humming, too, doubtless, if we could

hear it. What absurd notions are these of tigers scaling zeniths, bears climbing poles, and bull-baiting within the cirque of the zodiac! Do you remember what time of day it is? Why, not to mention the hero of "Locksley Hall," Pope could tell you a century-and-a-half ago to "correct old Time, and regulate the sun." I perceive what it is, my good itinerant; you are a plagiarist, and have gone ploughing to little purpose, I think, with a heifer of Alexander Smith's, "Summer had leapt on Edinburgh like a tiger." Do you remember that?'

'Yes, I do, now that you recall it to me, and perhaps it was in my head. But, mind you, I think it an inferior sentence.'

'Very well, then; amend your ways, and get on with your tour.'

The sunshine streamed down Sydenham Road, down the valleys that make Sydenham so picturesque and up again among thickets and crested

knolls, deep in June's fleece of leaves. It bathed the red villas nestling among the trees until they looked like enchanted dwellings. It rolled along the Parade and deluged the Crystal Palace with ceaseless showers that broke and sparkled in myriad foam flakes on that house of windows. Far over West Wood Common, far over the Nor Wood, the heaven-high billowy sunshine bore down on park and village, town and tower, overflowed London and flooded the world.

The itinerant went with the sunshine along Westow Hill, a quite modern street of shops that the summer light made romantic, and down the steep of Woodland Road to Gipsy Hill. Here, missing the way, he strayed so long among new villas that he began to feel suburban—the most terrible sensation it is possible to have within the six-mile radius. Slowly, then rapidly one goes mad, and at last sees Mr Podsnap's name on every letter the postman delivers, and beholds in every

house an installation of 'getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter-past, breakfasting at nine, going to the city at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven.' Literature, painting, sculpture, music — all of them embodiments of 'getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter-past—' No : not all—not all the music. Through an open window came a fresh young voice singing a love song. It was a dawning voice — more wonder, more wistfulness than passion in it, but emptied of everything suburban. Miss Podsnap never sang like that. The girl, seventeen, her hair loose on her shoulders, was listening to the music she sang, and the simple tune, the wondering voice, shattered the whole phantasmal structure of Podsnappery, discovering among the ruins a bower of roses, and a radiant figure in a saffron robe bearing a lighted torch.

Over Central Hill through the remnant of the Nor Wood the itinerant went with the sunshine

until they parted company in the shadow of the Convent wall. Through an open gateway little girls looked out with rosy faces ; in a glade well sheltered from the sun by old elms the Convent cows strayed, sedately ruminant ; and the itinerant marvelled at the times. In Westminster, Gladstone at eighty-four is leading a forlorn hope with the courage of twenty-five, and Chamberlain with his pale Disraelian complexion has in three months made himself a questionable new reputation. In the Strand they are playing Ibsen's 'Enemy of the People' ; on the Thames a thousand printing-presses clash and roll ; Podsnap and Veneering build their villas everywhere ; the drum of the Salvation Army booms throughout the land ; and the Crystal Palace flares above the nunnery. Yet here, pale women sing masses for the dead, and a matin bell tinkles clearly out of many old centuries.

By Crown Hill, a rustic village, he came to

Streatham Common, burnt to a cinder, edged with furze and high old trees, overlooking Surrey to the south and west. Towards Streatham village the common slopes like a bald brow gracefully receding, a fine old gentlemanly baldness. Looking back from the street in which the common ends abruptly, it was seen to be rather a crown than a brow—a friar's crown, with trees marking the tonsure. How his head steamed and frizzled—dry steam, so to speak, shimmering to the sky !

The itinerant entered the graveyard of Streatham Parish Church and rested on a tombstone opposite the tower—old, eight hundred years old, and built of Kent flint. The inscription on the spire seemed amusing. Here it is: 'The late spire of this church was destroyed by lightning on the morning of the 3rd January, 1841, and the present spire was erected during the same year.' This must have been the composition of the sexton. The phrasing of it, and the tone of respect—the

late spire'—indicate an author well-versed in mortuary writings. Doubtless he wrote at first the 'late *lamented* spire,' and was aggrieved when the churchwardens at the meeting held to approve of an inscription rejected the word 'lamented' by a majority of two.

Tooting Bec Common which lies between Streatham and Tooting, is reached by Tooting Bec Road. Although the Balham and Croydon Railway flows through this common, and although red brick begins to encroach on its outskirts, it retains a natural appearance. Across it stretch clumps of furze and groups of shadowy old trees, which the itinerant saw emerging like green shoals and green islands from the high tide of the sunshine.

He passed through Tooting and Upper Tooting—desolate suburbs smelling of new paint, hacked and chopped into unfinished streets and drain trenches. On a gable he noticed 'Tupper, Family Butcher,' and remembered that a Shelley shaves

easily in Tottenham, and a Shakespeare keeps a green grocery opposite the northern entrance to Clissold Park. He crossed the Wandle at a mill, and taking a wrong turning wandered down through Mitcham—all tedious new suburb, tropical sunshine, and roads so hot they seemed paved with good intentions. Podsnap's and Veneering's wives and families, and the wives and families of Podsnap's and Veneering's clerks and shopmen, aglow with the consciousness of the elegance and nobility of 'getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter-past, breakfasting at nine, going to the city at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven,' moved cheerfully about their broiling labyrinth. The itinerant thought he was never to get out of it. At last he arrived at Wimbledon station, still a good mile wide of the six-mile radius, and being fordone with the heat and dismayed beyond utterance by the unwilling

contemplation of miles of new suburb, he booked to Barnes.

Barnes station stands in Barnes Common ; and when you leave the train you are charmed to find that you have stepped back fifty years and more. Cows are browsing among the whins, and where the houses begin you look in vain for signs of the dreadful domestic architecture of the later Victorian era. In the irregular streets, mellow with age, every house looks like a home that has been occupied by the same family from generation to generation ; the drowsy shops seem as indifferent to custom as if business competition were still in embryo ; and the homely people, wondering in an ignorant old-world mood, stare at the visitor. Barnes Green is even more antique and restful than Barnes itself. A semi-circle of old houses, each with a name and an individuality of its own, stands round a large pond bordered by trees. It is difficult to realise that Hammersmith, London,

and the end of the nineteenth century are next door.

IV—FROM THE THAMES TO THE MOSELLE

It was nearly blood-heat in the shade. Out of the south-west, slow, lambent blasts streaked the glowing air and shook the scent from the limes in the Duke's Avenue leading to Chiswick House. Chiswick Parish Church was as hot as a kiln. In Chiswick Mall the old houses, sunburned and blistered through their veils of jasmine and clematis, opened all their windows for a breath of air. Chiswick eyot, bristling with osiers like a gigantic green clothes-brush, sighed—if a brush may be supposed to sigh—stified with scalding dust. The tepid Thames slid down its greasy channel, twisting and untwisting in surface eddies interlinked athwart and along, a dark ravelled skein, cut by thousands of keels and tangled by innumerable propellers, paddles, oars, and dredgers; and the

muddy banks, smooth and glossy, seemed melting away like butter—brown butter, churned out of the water by steamers, barges, and rowing-boats. The sun flamed in a sky of molten turquoise.

The charming name of a riverside village tempted the itinerant aside. He crossed the Chiswick peninsula, and came out at the east end of Strand-on-the-Green, a row of irregular old houses on the river bank, not so attractive as its name. Half-a-dozen launches and some barges were anchored in front of it. An eyot rose in the midst of the river, surrounded by ruined house-boats; a rusty dredger stood higher up; on the shore old barges had sunk into the mud, and grass and weeds grew up through their warped bottoms. The S.S. 'Wedding Ring' had just left Kew Pier, and was endeavouring for some reason to navigate the river broadside on; at the eyot it assumed the normal position.

The itinerant crossed the Thames to visit the

orchid-house in Kew Gardens. Orchids have a great fascination for him, as for most people. Mysterious creatures, living mostly on dew, they are the artists of the botanic world ; their moods are many and various ; their temperaments master them. Tranquil, chaotic, like the great poet Carlyle saw sitting among his dead dogs, they never know what they are going to do until their flowers come forth. As Bottom would fain have been everybody, so the orchid aims at being all flowers. It is a mere temperament without intellect, and sometimes endeavours to reproduce shapes and hues with which it has no native sympathy. The most conspicuous failures in Kew Gardens were certain unintelligent attempts to be freemasons' aprons ; the likeness was sufficiently close to be ridiculous ; but it was the orchid in a very inferior mood. Beside the abortive freemasons' aprons grew a most successful embodiment, a long spike imitative of the

flowering saugh—a cottage plant, called in Scotland 'the ranting widow': it is always easy for the artist to succeed when he keeps close to the hearth. Another triumphant success was a large waxen buttercup; here the orchid had improved on the original, adding to the golden hue and exquisite shape a seductive odour like that of the meadowsweet, but richer, as if intoxicated with the sunshine of the tropics. Pen-nibs of silver with points dipped in purple ink were a *succès d'estime*, and so were the barley ears with coloured crests. The comic orchids were no more than clever. Out of a mass of pulpy green leaves would be protruded now a piece of gas-pipe, now a twist of tobacco. Some from a nest of dried grass let down long sappy rushes. Some hung out faded fringes; others, long grey beards. Crowds of little magenta crabs crawled about on sprays of grey coral; gaping jaws cut off from heads, and disconsolate sporrans were among the

oddities, and things woven of worsted like bits of stocking. These were all inferior, though successful. Among the more melancholy failures were branches covered with little green flowers that had intended to develop colour and fragrance: pale green and envious they looked, evidently criticising the beauty and bloom about them. The endeavour to become heather on the part of several orchids was also melancholy—the most definite attempt at the impossible in the orchid-house. The reproduction of some waxen gummy heath would have been legitimate enough ; but it was madness for these wild tropical bloods to ape the hardness and delicacy of the temperate mountain plant. Of flowers above criticism because perfectly pleasing, the itinerant noticed one which united in itself the forms and hues of the narcissus and the snap-dragon, white splashed with gold and blood. Another combined the beauties of the columbine and the foxglove.

There were heliotrope - coloured lilies ; mythological shells of *Cythera*, silver veined with emerald ; and a spike of flowers of terra-cotta silk, more fanciful than imaginative, half vulgar half artistic, but wholly charming. Some ingenuous plants merely turned an ordinary leaf blood-red and called it a flower ; others less simply twisted a leaf into a scroll. The claret-jugs were interesting, but one admired them with a grudge. An enormous and monstrous blossom, like a lump of flesh with skewers sticking out of it, showed to what a depth of stupidity and nastiness uncontrolled temperament can descend. But the pansies and the primroses which grew beside this abominable malformation were as lovely as if they had come from an English glade.

The terrible temperaments of these tropical flowers began to exercise a spell on the itinerant, and he was glad to escape from their sorcery, and the moist enervating air they breathed. Outside

the danger was only one of roasting, an operation which does not necessarily destroy the shape ; in the orchid-house he felt as if he were about to be stewed out of all consistence, and transformed into a pulpy plant growing on a board. But he was too hot to walk immediately, so he took train to Acton. There he found himself once more in a dreadful suburban region that seemed to be limitless, except towards the east.

By Horn Lane and past Old Oak Common he came to Willesden Junction. Glimpses of Middlesex, wooded and undulating, appeared on the left, stretching out to the horizon and sweltering under the heat and the haze. On the skirts of the common a farmer had almost completed a great hay-stack—sixty feet high, he said.

‘Is there so much hay in the world this season?’ asked the itinerant.

‘You may well say it,’ he replied. ‘If you want to speculate, buy hay. Already it’s double

the usual price, and next spring it will be selling for its weight in gold.'

'Was this stack all grown in the neighbourhood?'

'Yes, in these half-dozen fields.'

They were well within the six-mile radius—Wormwood Scrubs barely half-a-mile away; and the itinerant saw, or thought he saw, nearer London towards the north-east, the white monuments of Kensal Green.

'Is suburban hay good?' he asked.

'Smell it,' said the farmer, giving him a handful.

It had, indeed, a delightful smell, like that of new milk with the faintest aroma of spice.

'That,' continued the farmer, 'is the best hay I ever reaped. The dryer the season the finer the hay; but that's no compensation for quantity. Last year I had more than three times as much hay from the same fields. I re-

quired more than half of it myself, so I'll have to buy fodder this year.'

The prospect seemed to dismay him little, however. He wished the itinerant a cheery good-day, and told him to be sure to come and draw his stack and the old farmhouse when the former was finished. The itinerant was pleased to be mistaken for a painter.

In spite of the heat he continued walking, and came by devious ways to Dudding Hill. Poplars in the fields, hollyhocks in the gardens, purple clouds of clematis on the cottage walls, a smartly dressed plumber with a cigarette in his mouth fitting a joint in a gaspipe in Harlesden Lane, distant wooded knolls appearing over the shoulders of nearer grassy knolls, a very small yellow-brick chapel opposite a huge red-brick public-house called inconceivably 'The Case is Altered,' flashed out of the glare and heat without rhyme or reason; for it was impossible either instinc-

tively or of malice aforethought to observe and select with the thermometer over 100 degrees.

At Dudding Hill station, waiting for a train to Hendon, the itinerant fell into a great discussion with the imaginary disputant. For the hundredth time the itinerant attacked the London suburb—the new order of slums that is fast girdling London.

DISPUTANT. What would you have? The London suburb is a great personality. It will flourish and grow strong, have its decadence, die, and be buried by an Improvement Trust. Like everything else that is born into the world—people, plagues, fashions—it must run its course. Give over grumbling about it. Study it, understand it.

ITINERANT (*feeling that the Disputant is right, and wishing to change the subject*). What do you mean by a personality? Formerly people talked of *having* personality; now, I observe, they talk of *being* a personality.

DISPUTANT. By personality I mean a man—except of course, when I use it metaphorically of suburbs—a man whose presence is power.

ITINERANT. Oh! you wouldn't use it of women then?

DISPUTANT. I don't think I have ever seen it used of women.

ITINERANT. I suppose it is pretty much the same thing as individuality, character.

DISPUTANT. Oh dear no! It is not by any means synonymous with individuality, still less with character. Remember, we talk of *having* individuality, not of *being* an individuality. A very dry ineffective person may have strong individuality—that is to say, an original attitude to the universe, and the power of insisting on self.

ITINERANT. And character? Hasn't character undergone the same change as personality?

DISPUTANT. Oh no! You see, when we say 'he is a character,' we do not mean the same

thing as when we say 'he *has* character'; and as yet there is no mocking sense in the expression 'he is a personality,' although the title is being dealt about so promiscuously, and so many are helping themselves to it, that it may very soon become a term of derision.

ITINERANT. Then a personality may be without individuality, without character?

DISPUTANT. Certainly: indeed, the less of character, the greater the personality.

ITINERANT. How?

DISPUTANT. A personality, as I have told you already, is a man whose presence is power. His intellect may be deficient; his conduct may stand no test at all, but he carries about with him a detached molecule of spirit, soul—what you like, with which, as with ozone, he electrifies the air: you hate him, or like him; you are impudent, or deferential, but you cannot be indifferent to him.

ITINERANT. Then, a personality may be a nonentity, for without individuality, and character—

But at that moment the train drew up, and the imaginary disputant vanished.

At Hendon the itinerant sat by the Welsh Harp under a tree, and watched an old man fishing. He baited with paste, and soon drew out a broad big-scaled fish, shining with grey-metallic lustre like nickel. It looked like a bream, and the itinerant remarked that it was one.

‘No,’ said the old fisher. ‘It’s a cross between a bream and a roach.’

‘And do fish cross that way?’

‘Oh, yes!’

Mongrels in the rivers and lakes! Mongrels in the sea! It was a new idea to the itinerant who had hitherto believed in the chastity and high-breeding of the whole finny race. Before he could question the fisher more on the subject, a slight

breeze brought down a certain odour on the wind, and he fled. Not far from where the fisher sat an open drain ran into the water. The Welsh Harp is the only lake near London. Does anybody know why it should be spoiled with sewage?

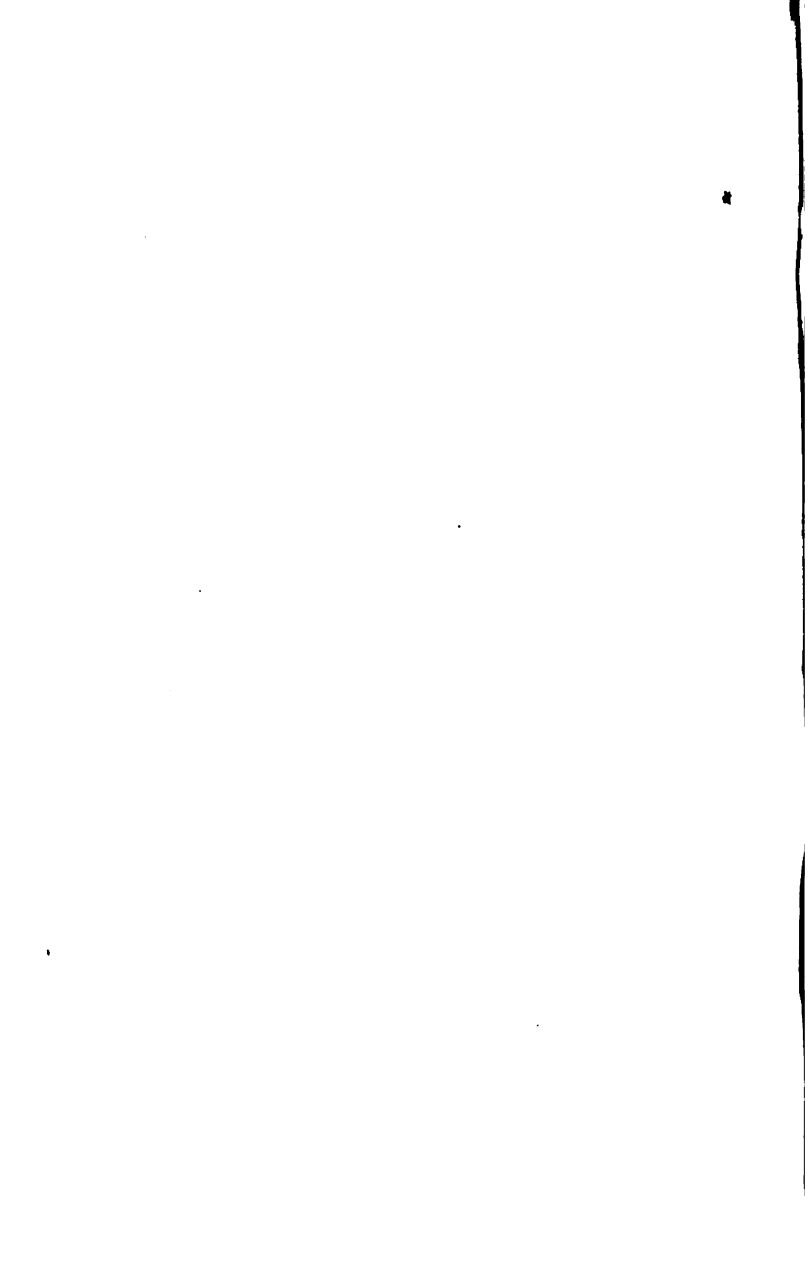
Through Hendon, but little touched by the jerry-builder, along Brent Street, by field-paths, he went to Finchley; and by Finchley over Muswell Hill, and through Hornsey he came to Green Lanes, red-hot houses, green-flaming trees, and scalding roads all the way. The wide undulating country shivered under the heat; the turquoise sky flickered with blue flame; and the relentless sun burned into the core of the world.

In Green Lanes the itinerant's journey ended at the Great Eastern station. There the Moselle, a brook which rises near Highgate, flows under the road. Whence its name is derived, and whether it empties its tribute of diluted mud into

the Lea, or gets lost in a drain, the itinerant has never been able to discover.

Should another think of travelling round London let him try the eighth radius : at eight miles from Charing Cross you begin to be free of the dreadful suburb which, between the fourth and seventh radii, seems to propagate itself by fission before your very eyes.

AMONG THE CHILTERN



AMONG THE CHILTERNNS

I—FROM TRING STATION TO WENDOVER

THERE is little hope for anyone who does a thing right the first time ; the chances are that he will never be able to do the thing better than right. This applies to visiting the Chiltern Hills as well as to other branches of art. The artist has often more interest and pleasure in the rough sketch, wherein his eye perceives among the hundreds of tentative strokes the true figure of his imagination, than in the finished picture, which is a fulfilment without further promise ; and the itinerant thinks that his mistaken wanderings over the Chilterns were more to his mind than a well-ordered journey would have been.

In the map he found that a horn of Hertfordshire stuck into Buckinghamshire about the middle of the range, and that at the base of this horn there was a town called Tring. About ten miles from Tring he noted another town, Prince's Risborough, in the very midst of the Bucks Chilterns. His plan was to walk across the hills from Tring to Risborough. But on his first visit he saw neither Risborough nor Tring, although he took a train for Tring from Euston, and came out at Tring station.

The railway porter being unable to direct the itinerant to the Risborough Road, he applied at the Royal Hotel, the only building in sight besides the station. The landlady very graciously brought him a map, but seemed rather nonplussed when he told her that he wanted to walk over the hills from Tring to Risborough.

'That would be rather a roundabout,' she said.

The itinerant was indifferent so long as he kept

off the highway. Still the landlady looked non-plussed. Whereupon the itinerant pointed out Tring and Risborough on the map, and showed her that there were hills all the way between them, so that there would be no roundabout in going *over* them.

‘Oh! I see,’ said the landlady, smiling with sudden apprehension of the difficulty. ‘But you’re not at Tring; this is only Tring station. We’re in Aldbury, here. Tring’s two miles away. See.’

The itinerant looked and saw from the railway route on the map that it was so.

‘Tring’s altogether off your way,’ the landlady said. ‘You could go best by Wigginton.’

‘And can I go over the hills that way?’

‘Yes, there’s a footpath all the way. It’s about two miles from here.’

‘And what is my next point after Wigginton on the road to Risborough?’

'Wendover,' said the landlady. With great clearness she described the course of the upland footpath as far as Wigginton. Arrived there, the itinerant was to inquire his further way.

He crossed the canal, found the gate the landlady had spoken of, and a field-path leading past a mansion and over a low hill. There was nothing in the sky but the sun, the moon in her first quarter, soft and filmy, reserved and secret-like, but silver-shining although it was high noon, and a chorus of tireless larks. High up they sang at the pitch of their voices; the volume, persistence, and breathless rapture of their singing as great and wonderful as the human listener has found it in all ages. They are the bravest of birds, with the bravery of ignorance, and scandalously optimistic. In Leadenhall Market their brothers are to be had in strings at a shilling the dozen, and here were they singing over the Chilterns as if there could by no possibility be

anything else in the world than nesting-times and sunshine. 'Are not two sparrows sold for one farthing? and not one of them is forgotten before God.' Surely, thought the itinerant, these larks 'are of more value than many sparrows.' But remembering the London restaurants, was it not a mockery to cry, 'God save you, Chiltern larks'? When will man perceive that he and he alone is responsible for all the good and ill in the world? What sinners, what sluggards and ignoramuses we are! With a free hand for thousands of years, we have not yet managed to control our harvests, or to prevent the birth of idiots.

As the landlady had predicted, the itinerant came shortly to a highway, across which he found another gate on the latch. He had been ascending all the time, and had now come to the brow of the hill, among larches and birches hanging with soft green. Higher up he reached a grove of beeches. The old trees had fluted stems, knobs and bosses

where the sap had boiled over, and long intertwining branches, as if they stood embraced and ready for the dance—listening for the word or note to dissolve the spell that held them root-bound. In the case of the younger ones, tall and graceful, their branches hanging easily about them, the spell had evidently been already dissolved; but they, too, were waiting—perhaps to choose partners, or for the old ones to lead off, or on account of some whim; but the charm will be wrought again before they can make up their minds to trip off down the hill and see the world; and the axe may be their sole disenchanter, at a time, too, when it would content them just to be conscious of the sap rising in the spring, to be assured that they are only not dead.

Behind the beeches lay a field on whose dimpled slopes, covered with the downy green of the springing corn, the brown earth was visible like the cheek of a young man through an un-

razored beard. Towards Aldbury there was ploughed land on the hill-sides, which the itinerant surveyed with much curiosity, as he had never been on a chalk escarpment before.* Some of the fields were as white as a leper, some only buff-coloured, and in some again the brown earth was streaked and pied with stripes and blotches of white soil—very curious and artificial looking when seen for the first time. To the north-west the view was uninterrupted far across Buckinghamshire, a rolling plain, rich with England's best. In Wendover a mill stood up forlorn, its arms shivering idly in the wind ; it seemed to look out across the fields tinged with the green of the coming harvest—not so forlornly, either ; hopefully rather, if with a little anxiety : there will surely be work for the wind and it yet. But the mill must have sighed to itself, for there was such a magnificent steady east blowing, like the

* The visit to Amersham, p. 39, was a month later.

strong flight of a flock of birds, and knowing no lull in the plain. On the hill it rose and fell, and sighed and roared among the beeches with the sound of November in its voice, but summer in its breath, drunk with weeks of level sunshine. On the surges of its deafening chant, like crests of foam on the waves, or lightning glancing on a soaring cloud, the lofty notes of the tireless larks sparkled and shone, tongues of flame in the storm of sound.

Again a road, fulfilling the landlady's prophecy, and across it an open gate. There were no locks or bars anywhere in the whole of the itinerant's journey, and no notice of prosecution visible in the length and breadth of the land. Here a ditch ran along the footpath inlaid with blue flowers and white, yellow blossoms and red; there on the hill-face at the foot of the straggling trees, a purple carpet of hyacinths spread, diapered with primrose and pale anemone. Through the furrow of a ploughed

field, foul with flints, the itinerant came to the landlady's third road, and this he had to follow for a little way into Wigginton.

A small straggling village, Wigginton seemed uninhabited. Not a soul was visible ; the windows were closed and the blinds down against the heat and the dusty wind. Somebody must be found of whom to inquire the way. The doors of the alehouses also were shut ; but the itinerant entered one of them and inquired of the comely black-eyed girl behind the bar how he was to get to Wendover. She couldn't say, but would ask her mother. The mother was equally ignorant, but would ask the grandmother — and Wendover barely four miles off as the crow flies ! The grandmother, deaf and invisible, cried from within, 'Go 'cross hill to 'Astoe.' Then the youngest of the three, understanding the bearings, told him to turn up past the inn, and the footpath would bring him to Hastoe. She asked him also if

he would not sit down and rest. He did so for five minutes, while the country barmaid, in a blue wrapper and bare-armed, but with a very comely face and soft black eyes, talked cheerfully about nothing, glad of a stranger.

The road to Hastoe led past a farm, where a black long-snouted sow assumed a defiant attitude snorting among her farrow, eight little shining nigger pigs. One of them, a burly youngster, moving his nostrils at a prodigious rate, ran away from his mother into a horse-pond inhabited by two grey geese. Speechless with indignation, the geese rose up from where they floated, stood in the mud on their tiptoes, stretched out their necks, and flapped their wings. The adventurous pigling, undismayed, nuzzled about in the water at the brink of the pond, until one of the geese, unable to contain herself any longer, struck at him with her bill. At that he turned his curly tail and fled to his mother, squealing for sym-

pathy ; but she refused to pet him, and he retired to a corner to sulk. Cows lay basking in the sun in a paddock at hand, under the apparent superintendence of a meditative donkey ; and a little farther on, a cornfield, marked profusely with sacks of soot, sloped up the hill. Here the itinerant met a tall man of between fifty and sixty years old, in his shirt sleeves, and wearing a straw hat ; he limped a little and carried a stick in one hand, and a basket of eggs in the other.

‘Good morning. That’s soot in these sacks, isn’t it ?’ said the itinerant.

‘Yes,’ replied the other. ‘I pay two-and-six for each of these sacks, measter, and three-ha’pence for sowing them ; besides beer to the men.’

It was the farmer himself, good-natured, shrewd, with a cast of countenance indicating originality of character. The itinerant thought how unlike a Scotchman he was, for he had volunteered all

that information about the soot in reply to the itinerant's assertive question as to its being soot or not.

'I suppose soot's good for corn,' said the itinerant.

'A power o' good,' replied the farmer.

'What does it do to the corn?'

FARMER. It's good for it; it's a manure, you know—a kind of artificial manure. I think sut's a splendid manure—the best artificial manure. Ten sacks an acre is a very good dressing; eight sacks a fair dressing; I give about nine.

ITINERANT. How does the weather please you?

FARMER. Well, I think we'd be the better of rain.

But the itinerant was not to have all the questions.

FARMER. Have you seen the papers this morning? (*It was the twenty-second of April.*)

ITINERANT. Yes.

FARMER. I see they've passed the second

reading of that damned Home Rule Bill. The country 'll be ruined when it becomes law.

ITINERANT. Oh, but it will never become law.

FARMER. Well, if you'll convince me of that it'll be a load off my mind.

The itinerant is no politician; he had made his declaration about the Home Rule Bill simply to soothe the farmer, and without anticipating the necessity of supporting it. Indeed, he sees no reason why it, or anything, should not become law. As his interlocutor seemed really concerned, and with an open mind for the opinion of a stranger, the itinerant raked up such answers as he had heard.

FARMER. That's terew. But I wish Gladstone was dead. It's a sinful wish, but they tell me he's a—not a mesmeriser—a—what is it?—a *hyptoniser*. He hyptonises people, and makes them think as he thinks, everywhere.

ITINERANT. I daresay there's something in that.

Last summer I saw Gladstone shortly after the election walking in Bond Street about six in the evening. Nobody was within three hundred yards of us. He came along slowly, his legs somewhat wide apart, as an old man walks, but erect, with his head thrown back. There was something stealthy in his motion, as of an old lion walking in an unaccustomed place. His eyes—immense orbs they are now, much larger than in his younger days—were full of a dream away far in front of him, but ready to flash. It was Saturday, and all the shops were shut. There was no sound in the street but Gladstone's light tread, for I stood aside till he should pass. As he turned into Burlington Gardens, eighty-three years on his head, and every ideal strong within him still, I thought I had seen the most wonderful sight London had yet offered me. Black broadcloth, ordinary silk hat—it was yet to me as if a vision had passed.

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The farmer thought the itinerant a very poor creature, and smiled sardonically.

FARMER. He hyptonised you. Now, he never hyptonised me. I've seen him often in the very path we're now in. He used to stay over the hill there with— But you're not from these parts.

ITINERANT. No; I'm a Scotchman. Have you any Scotchmen about here?

FARMER. Not about here. But towards Luton way some Scotch farmers came twenty years ago; and they've managed to stop, which we English farmers can't do.

ITINERANT. Oh! How is that? Superior thrift?

FARMER. Well, no; we're thrifty enough. But *we* stick to our old ways, and *they*'ve gone into milk, and that pays best beside a railway.

He was a pleasant, odd, shrewd farmer, with only a slight accent and no dialect, but a Yankee-like inflection at the end of his sentences.

The itinerant reached Hastoe before he knew it. Asking a rustic the way thither he was told he was there—all that he saw being three roads and two houses. The rustic failed to understand the itinerant's desire to go over hill: the road was cut up and bad, he said; and it was only by dragging it out of him that the itinerant learned how to follow the field-path to Wendover.

Past a cottage where a holly, full of scarlet berries, rubbed branches with an apple-tree, all one faint blush of blossom, through a pleasant wood of larches and young beeches where no wind blew, he came to a cherry-tree waving its branches like censers, and scattering on the air its bitter-sweet incense. Further on a copper, tended by an old man, boiled and bubbled in an outhouse above a roaring fire of brushwood. And still no cloud in the sky; only the brilliant sun, the tireless larks, the gorgeous weather.

It was now past two, and the itinerant had

eaten nothing since eight o'clock. Instead of going on through the wood, as soon as he reached a highway he looked about him for an inn. He found a hedge-tavern, on which a ticket announced that the tenant was 'licensed to sell beer by retail to be consumed on or off the premises.' The premises consisted of a but-and-ben: in the kitchen he found a seat, and made a sixth with the company already assembled. The ale-wife, old and bent, but smiling pleasantly, was at her own meal of coffee and bread-and-butter. An old man, two lads, and a schoolboy were eating bread and cheese, or smoking and drinking ale. Attacking the contents of his satchel, and with a pint from the goodwife's barrel, the itinerant started a conversation about the weather. Much of what was said in reply to his remarks he failed to make out. The rustics seemed very reluctant to use their jaws for any purpose except eating; when they spoke, they simply left their mouths ajar, and

allowed their tongues to wag the maimed words of an unknown dialect.

A young man in velveteens entered, sat a little while, made some civil remarks in a recognisable speech, and went away with a greybeard full of beer. 'What does he do?' asked the itinerant when he had gone.

'He's an underkeeper,' said the frankest of the rustics. 'He's my brother,' he added.

The itinerant then asked them to take beer with him, which they did. They all talked better after it. One of them had been in London, and never wanted to go back. Byford Hill and Aston Hill were the names of two of the Chilterns; and Byford was 'the highest hill in England'—England consisting of this hedge-tavern, a church, a parsonage, a school-house, together called St Leonard's, and the neighbouring hundred. But this was the very information the itinerant wanted, and having been instructed how to reach

'the highest hill in England,' he resumed the way.

He had found it unnecessary to go to Tring ; he had given up all hopes of reaching Risborough ; and by taking a wrong turning he came out on the top not of Byford but of Aston Hill. A second and older man in velveteens told him where he was, and pointed out Halton Towers, Mentmore, and Waddesdon. Wendover was still a mile-and-a-half away, and the footpath lay through the grounds of Halton Towers, a charming walk all down hill. He was tired, but he still watched the sky and the land—the moon clearer and keener as the sun left it behind, Buckinghamshire and the horn of Hertford spread out before him. He saw that in the shade the young green of the corn gave the chalky soil a mauve colour ; he startled two thrushes busy nest-building in a low hedge : and he arrived at Wendover in time to catch a train for Baker Street.

II—FROM WENDOVER TO HIGH WYCOMBE

It was the middle of July before the itinerant returned to the Ohilterns. Shortly after noon he arrived at Wendover, and picked up the way where he had left it. But first he sauntered about Wendover, an ancient, sunny village on a hill slope. Every third house seemed to be an inn. The Rising Sun, with tiled panels of the four seasons on one of its gables, The Rose and Crown, The Pack Horse, The Nag's Head, were all equally inviting; but, for a change, he lunched in the Coffee-House, an antique, high-shouldered, steep-roofed building beside the church. An old *Illustrated London News* with pictures of Hughenden lay on the table; through the open window came the shouts of children on their way back to school after dinner; the high-pitched school-bell tinkled in a scolding voice, but not unmelodiously; and the coffee-house keeper

served on lavender - scented linen his homely nectar and ambrosia.

'Why have you spoiled your room?' asked the itinerant.

'How do you mean, sir?' replied the coffee-house keeper.


'The fire-place.'

The itinerant meant that a new grate, quite ample certainly, and two large presses, now filled up the buxom old ingle, looking very much out of keeping with the low roof, and the cross-beam in high relief.

'We were pressed for room,' said the coffee-house keeper, innocent of any intention to pun.

'This house must be a hundred or two years old,' said the itinerant.

'Nearer three hundred,' said the coffee-house keeper. 'When we lifted the floor of the room above this some years ago we found old silver coins of James I's time, one as early as 1609.'



Any history of the house, however, its occupant was unable to give.

A few old men, sunning themselves about the church, and one or two women going errands, looked curiously at the itinerant as he passed through the village to the hill. Thatch, tile, and slate were on the roofs ; white and pink wash on the fronts ; low, square windows, girding the houses, and high, short, broad ones, gleaming and frowning under the heavy eaves, caught the sun on one side of the street and its reflection on the other.

The way lay past the glaring new station, and over the railway bridge. One side of the chalk cutting was sprinkled with red poppies, like bloodstains on snow. In the ditches wild thyme grew rank, and the bees sighed and sang among its searching odour. Haws were beginning to redden in the hedges ; and bramble blossoms blushed here and there.

A green and white path wound up the hill ; coltsfoot shone among the turf, little nuggets of pure gold ; three ladies sat on a knoll in red and black with parasols ; and a free fair wind blew across the plain. In Wendover the windmill which the itinerant had seen idling in the spring faced the north-west, conjuring the powers of the air with the strong slow motion of its wide arms. Through the dappled sky the sun shone in spells and spurts. Black vapour hung about the Thames valley ; but from the western to the northern horizon, between the earth and a semi-circle of grey cloud, a white zone stretched, cracked and ragged-edged, like a shard of an immense porcelain globe. At the foot of the hill white fields, green fields, yellow and bronze fields carpeted the rich vale of Aylesbury ; the red roofs and walls of Aylesbury town glowed and smoked like dying brands as the sunshine came and went ; wood and forest, ridge and slope stretched away, crowding

together in herds and clusters over Whaddon Chase, to Salcey Forest and Yardly Oak, to the borders of Northamptonshire and the blue distance. A far-off train clanked musically; the wind sang over the hill with bees in its bosom; and the sunshine shifted about the landscape.

More than a week of hissing, singing rains, sometimes by night, sometimes by day, had restored England to itself. The white, parched roads of April, May, and June had grown brown and elastic; the woods sent up a mist, and the pale hills were all a green blush once more.

The hill behind Wendover is perhaps the nakedest of the richly wooded Chilterns. A piece of tall hedge climbs over it, the remnant of some old division; and brakes of furze and bramble—a wilderness indeed, overspreads its broad top. On the bushes the berries were formed in copper clusters, large and beginning

to blacken; and many broad blossoms, deeply tinged for bramble bloom, blushed like foolish virgins thinking how late they were. The tinkle of a bell floated down the wind, and rounding a knoll the itinerant saw a flock of sheep, newly shorn, newly washed, of a creamy whiteness, feeding near the shepherd and his dog. The bell-wether kept up a constant ringing as he cropped the close grass; the Chiltern shepherd far down the hill lay under a hawthorn, restful and vacant-minded.

Have not the imperial Romes, pagan and Christian, gunpowder, the press, the French Revolution, steam, electricity, left the shepherd's lot unaltered? Changed methods, changed economy, for tillers and harvesters, for masons, miners, carpenters, ironworkers; but the shepherd still pursues his simple calling, as he did on the plains of Chaldea before the first temple was built, unchanged and unchangeable in manner

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and form. And the blacksmith—he also, at his forge, has changed but little.

‘What!’ cried the imaginary disputant. ‘Are horse-shoes not yet made by machinery?’

‘I hardly know,’ replied the itinerant. ‘I should think not—certainly not to any extent.’

‘Let us ask the shepherd,’ said the disputant.

‘Useless,’ rejoined the itinerant. ‘The shepherd cannot possibly know anything about it.’

‘I warrant he does,’ cried the disputant.

‘Impossible!’ maintained the itinerant.

‘Put it to the test.’

‘No,’ cried the itinerant, suddenly overcome with fear. ‘I have idealised that shepherd, and dare not approach him lest I should find him with a copy of the *Commonweal* in his pocket.’

‘Or a French grammar, or Pitman’s shorthand,’ said the disputant vanishing.

After the brambly wilderness came a stretch

of heather and rasps. The rasps were abundant, but not so large nor so well-flavoured as those of Cumbræ and Bute. The itinerant was certain of that; but the imaginary disputant reappeared for a second, pointed out to him that at thirty-five, after fifteen years of tobacco and alcohol, the palate becomes blunt.

‘True,’ said the itinerant; ‘but not on a day like this: a hill-side and a wandering wind can make even an old man’s senses as acute as a boy’s.’

Then came a withered heath; and out of it, almost from between the itinerant’s feet, a lark with hissing wings shot up like a rocket. Right underneath it he watched its ascent; he had never had such an opportunity before. It wedged its way up spirally; and as distance gradually hid the corkscrew motion, it seemed to be climbing a stair, moving from side to side with each step like a skater. At a certain height the

direct ascent changed to an oblique one; the lark had ceased drilling a passage through the air, and impelled by the momentum acquired in its long involved race up the skies, it slid without effort high into the blue. The descent was a continuation of the ascending slide, its wings remaining motionless, until, near the earth, they were employed as breaks to avoid destruction. And all the while the powerful song went on, firing the air.

The itinerant left the hill at Ellesborough and rested there in the Rose-and-Crown, a wayside inn with a thatched roof. The sofa in the low-ceiled parlour, and the country ale were good. The cheerful alewife, uncertain of the way, sent in a jolly young countryman who told him how to go. Outside on an eminence opposite the inn stood a lofty-minded goose contemptuously surveying the universe. It made no remark; but stretched its long neck, thrust up its bill, and thought to itself,

'I may be intoed, and my voice may be harsh, but I am the biggest, and therefore the most important fowl on the face of the earth.' Clearly, a most local goose, and one that had never seen a swan, nor heard of an ostrich, and thought

'The rustic cackle of its bourg
The murmur of the world.'

Past Ellesborough Church, standing on a hill, a footpath led through the Chequers. The Chilterns are famous for their beeches; none are finer than those that grow in this estate. High up on knolls they stand, letting the light hide among their fluted stems. In glades, boxwood, with its dark-green glossy leaf, muffles their smooth trunks. In a bay that runs deep into the hill they throng together on either side, masses and clouds of foliage—a green sea cleft asunder by some enchanter's rod. Towering in rounded waves, whose flanks the breeze ripples, whose crests stream in the wind, the high green banks seem always about to lapse into their

channel, but are always withheld. Far back in the hill the opposing sides meet as under a bastion; and where they join, the trees climb up against each other, and pressing close burst aloft into a fountain that showers in emerald spray. The light slumbers and wakes on the hanging billows, and the shadows sleep in their bosoms.

Through fields, populous with ant hills, the itinerant came to the highway, to Little Kimble and Great Kimble, reposeful upland hamlets. At Great Kimble he enjoyed for the first time in his life a wash at a pump. It is impossible, in words, to convey an impression of the delights, after a long walk, of being pumped to and on, of yellow soap, and a huckaback towel.

‘A bathe in the sea?’ queries the imaginary disputant.

‘Yes, that is free and noble; and yet brutal withal. It is the limitation of a pump compared

with the sea, and its freedom compared with a basin that make it so seductive.'

Between Great Kimble and Monks' Risborough, under the eave of a hill, is the village of Whiteleaf. Old thatched houses among trees, sitting above the world, overlooking the highway from a distance, steeped in memories, good friends with Time; a place to live in : exquisite, under the eave of the hill ; a place to die in.

Prince's Risborough is called after the Black Prince, who built a castle there, hoping to retire from the world. The name of the place and two Black Prince inns are the only memorials of him left. Larger and more modernised than Wendover, Prince's Risborough is a pleasant market town. Prosperous old vines grow against gables in the open street. It is a well-sheltered place, with a thriving look about it.

In the graveyard on one side of a decaying

wooden memorial, in shape like the end of a French bedstead, is the following couplet :—

‘Scize upon truth wherever it is found,
Whether on heathen or on Christian ground.’

This early agnostic rhyme is in memory of ‘Sophia, daughter of James and Sarah West, who died June 23, 1852, aged 20 years.’

The first train for London was not due for an hour-and-a-half; so the itinerant, having refreshed himself with tea, determined to walk to West Wycombe and pick up the train there. The sky had grown grey, and a cool wind blew—a September evening in July. Countless larks climbed up and down the air. Singing since March, all day and every day, strong-throated, strong-winged, they laced the grey evening with living gold. But the itinerant had ceased to observe; he could endure no more impressions for the time being, so he summoned the imaginary disputant.

DISPUTANT. What do you want?

ITINERANT. Say something.

DISPUTANT. It is always melancholy to reflect how often effort and ambition have failed to attain their object, and how many poor souls, dying in the firm belief that their friends would do them justice, are buried more effectually than in their graves, in the memories of those who knew them only to slight them.

ITINERANT. Why do you say that?

DISPUTANT. I thought it would suit your evening mood.

ITINERANT. No. Try again.

DISPUTANT. Do you assent to the hypothesis that Dr Johnson may now at the end of a series of incarnations and possibly invegetations, be found embodied in Mark Twain?

ITINERANT. The whirligig of time might easily bring in a less good-natured revenge. But you do not hit my mood.

DISPUTANT. Self-control is the whole secret of life.

ITINERANT. Imprudence is the whole secret of life. Anything is the whole secret of life.

DISPUTANT. Why do you talk nonsense?

ITINERANT. It is not nonsense. But why do you quote Goethe?

DISPUTANT. Burns says it also.

ITINERANT. Burns? I have forgotten.

DISPUTANT. Forgotten? Burns's own epitaph!

ITINERANT. Probably I know it by heart; but my memory is a most felonious traitor.

The itinerant saw that the disputant, hitherto a shadowy figure, had now taken the appearance of an old friend.

DISPUTANT.

'The poor inhabitant below
Was quick to learn and wise to know,
And keenly felt the friendly glow
And softer flame;
But thoughtless follies laid him low
And stained his name.

'Reader, attend :—whether thy soul
Soars fancy's flights beyond the pole,
Or darkling grubs this earthly hole
In low pursuit ;
Know, prudent, cautious self-control
Is wisdom's root.'

ITINERANT. But who wants to be wise? Who would not rather have been Burns than Dugald Stewart, Mirabeau than Talleyrand, Byron than Wordsworth?

DISPUTANT. Burns than Goethe?

ITINERANT. (*Says nothing.*)

DISPUTANT. Self-control, as I understand it, is the keystone of genius: without it, you may have wonderful ruins, but no lofty bridge triumphantly spanning life. The terrible gifts of brain and blood slay the Titans — Mirabeau, Burns, Byron; the Gods, Shakespeare and Goethe, chain their intellects and temperaments.

ITINERANT. But that is Carlyle.

DISPUTANT. But! But me no buts. It is as if you said 'but that is truth.'

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ITINERANT. Nay, then, I see you have the receipt of the absolute, and walk unassailable.

DISPUTANT. Absolute and unassailable, I stand upon a rock.

ITINERANT. But I would sooner float upon the sea, driven by every wind, tossed from wave to wave, to lie at last drowned in the deepest vale the ocean hides.

‘Obscurest night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,
Wash’d headlong from on board ;
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home for ever left.

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‘No voice divine the storm allayed,
No light propitious shone ;
When snatch’d from all effectual aid,
We perish’d, each alone :
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm’d in deeper gulfs than he.’

I would sooner be a castaway than not sail at all.

DISPUTANT. On shore or at anchor, one —
But no ; so would I.

“ O whatna mountain’s yon,” she said,
“ Sae drear wi’ frost and snow ? ”
“ O yon’s the mountain o’ Hell,” he cried,
“ Where you an’ me must go ! ”

‘ An’ aye when she turn’d her round about,
The taller he seemed to be ;
Until the tops o’ the gallant ship
Nae taller were than he !

‘ He strak the mainmast wi’ his haun’,
The foremast wi’ his knee ;
The gallant ship was broke in twain,
And sunk into the sea.’

The larks had fallen silent ; foreshadowings
of night crept up the sky ; the wind blew chill ;
in front, the dark woods of West Wycombe were
veiled by a shower of rain that fluttered in
the wind like a netted curtain of film. Soon
the itinerant was wrapped in its thin clammy
folds ; but the station was near, and the train—
too near : it clanked past, before he came within

hail of the booking-office; and he found himself a land castaway. To be drowned in the deepest pit of the sea had seemed noble; now he grumbled at a shower. There were no more trains from West Wycombe; but at High Wycombe, two-and-a-half miles away, one left for Paddington at ten minutes past nine: he could catch it easily as it was not yet eight. In an inn parlour, where the landlady's daughters plied their seams, and the landlady entertained him with the gossip of the place, he rested for ten minutes. Then he took the road again. Thin sheets of rain shrouded him at intervals; in the dry spaces between, pale shafts of light struck the hedgerows, barely bringing out their dark green hue. The tumbling clouds drifted across the sky, an aimless, endless tumult. Horses appeared, wheels rolled, out of the mist—low laughing voices, and the flushed, wet face of a girl. Houses like shadows, the gleam of a river flowing through a street,

ghostly people, a high market-place—High Wycombe, all fantastic, built on hills; lastly, the station, and a while to wait.

The itinerant summoned the imaginary disputant. He came—this time unknown, unfriendly; but he still talked of Burns. (If anyone is afraid of his own night thoughts, let him stop here. What follows is, in reality, not thought; only a mood—as all thought is. There is no such thing as thought—only mood.)

DISPUTANT. Burns was a gross creature—a gross, faithless creature.

ITINERANT. No; Burns was a great lover—a man ‘full of desires,’ like the prophet Daniel; strong bodies and splendid temperaments; so well attuned that the one on pulse and water grew fairer and fatter than all the youths that did eat of the king’s meat, and the other on porridge and whisky supported during seventeen years a passion for all the women in the countryside.

DISPUTANT. A gross lover ! a most foolish and gross lover, wasting those treasures of his blood that should have nourished his genius.

ITINERANT. What else could he do, in his place, with his temperament ?

DISPUTANT. Continnence is the mother of art : you'll find it so, notwithstanding Raphael and Heine.

ITINERANT. But Burns was no artist.

DISPUTANT. He was too incontinent.

ITINERANT. Ah ! he was a great lover.

DISPUTANT. A gross lover. And in friendship as gross as in love : he admired men to their faces ; he wrote them rhyming epistles.

ITINERANT. There is no need to lug in his friendships. What from another would have been flattery was from him simply the glowing recognition of his fiery heart. You slander him. Disembodied phantom, what can you know of such gifts of blood and brain as Burns's were ?

DISPUTANT. He might have been more refined.
The delicacy of love was unknown to him.

ITINERANT. The delicacy of love! I understand you now, decadent disputant. You would have women trained as they are said to be in Turkey. You would take the bandage from Cupid's eyes, and turn the 'ruddy offices of love' to unblushing lasciviousness. The delicacy of love? The diletantism of love! I have heard men of twenty-five complaining how innocent in love women are. What right has a man to invade the secrets of his mistress's mood; to search the depths of her desire, doling out his passion, nursing and herding hers! How ghastly! Better a million times cry out with Burns,

'My dearest blood to do them good,
They're welcome till't, for a' that';

with Marlow,

'But, by the chaps of Hell, to do thee good,
I'll freely spend my thrice decocted blood!'

DISPUTANT. Ahem ! Well, it *is* dark, and there's nobody else in the station. But these are remarkable parallel passages. It is quite unlikely that Burns ever saw the latter. Are you sure it is Marlow ?

ITINERANT. It is generally considered to be by Marlow. . But Adam said it—Adam, who was God's model : not the other way, as stated in Genesis : and yet that remark about making man in God's image comes nearer the truth, being the reverse of it, than anything else about God in the Old Testament.

DISPUTANT. You might say there was reciprocity : anthropomorphism on man's part ; theomorphism, on God's.

ITINERANT. Admirable ! The Greeks and Romans said it ; all great lovers said it, and will say it. It was breathed into God with the breath of man ; it is the word of God. Your decadence, your factitious decadence—for I deny that it exists, except in the

fancies of a few—is happily helping us to one thing: to freedom of speech, the lack of which has cramped the literature of England for a century. They walked in Cyprus and danced after Hymen in patent leather pumps with corns on their toes ; but now the time of sandals is coming in.

DISPUTANT. No decadence, you say ; no decadence ?

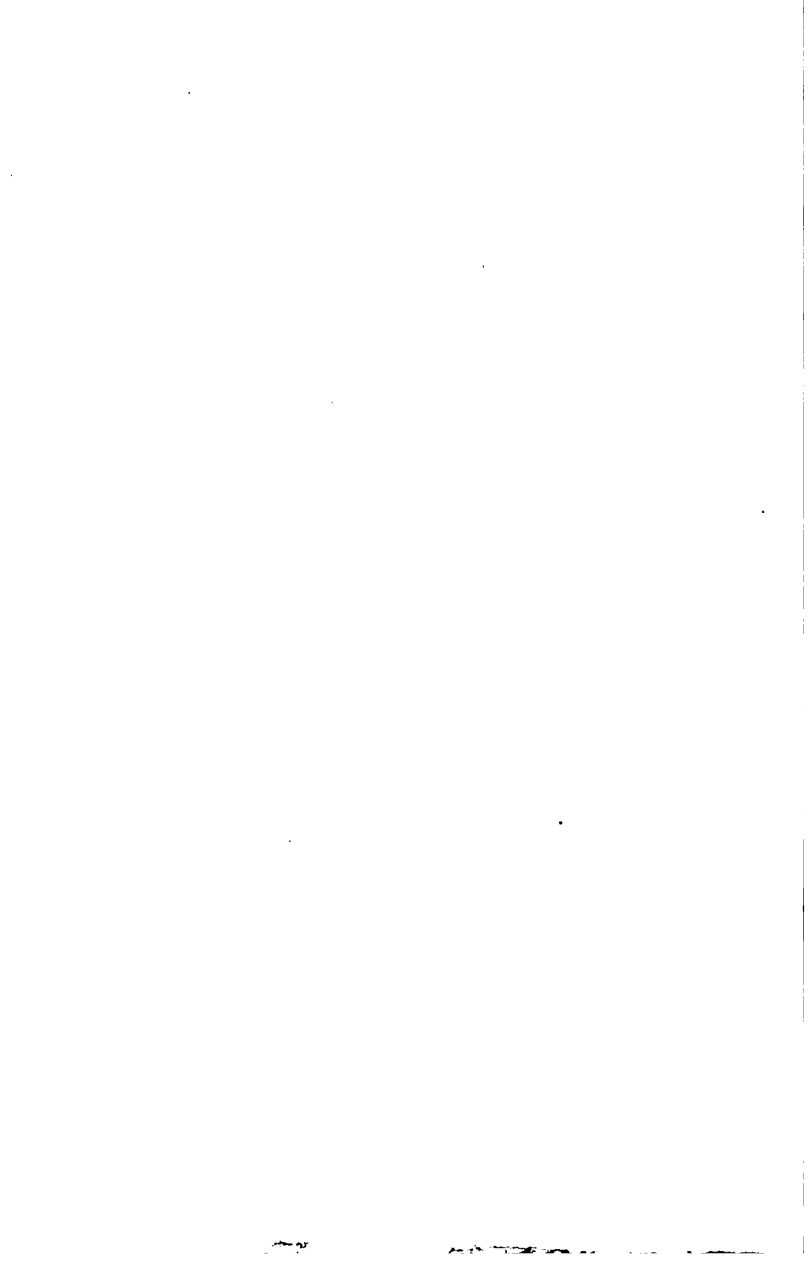
ITINERANT. No ; no more than there has been for these nineteen hundred years. The Christian Era is the decadence—the centuries of the tyrannous God, and the pathetic mediator, when man lay under the dominion of the future. ‘Now ! now !’ they clamoured—‘now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation !’ But the rich and powerful dashed the cup of life from the lips of the people, and told them heaven would make amends. The whole world groans and travails with a new God. Wordsworth hints it ; Tennyson and Carlyle hoped not ; Swinburne sings it ;

Ibsen, that great Scotchman, says it. A new Heaven ; a new Earth.

DISPUTANT. My good itinerant, you must be a very young man.

ITINERANT. Young? No; old, Master Shallow, old; eighteen hundred and ninety-three years old. The heirs of all the ages, we are all eighteen hundred and ninety-three years old at least.

BY WAY OF EPILOGUE



BY WAY OF EPILOGUE

DISPUTANT. I have been reading the proofs of the 'Random Itinerary,' and I don't like some things in it.

ITINERANT. Neither do I; neither does the author. A book which entirely pleased its author would be unreadable: the faults and weaknesses of men and authors are alone interesting. But what do you object to? Have *you* not received justice?

DISPUTANT. That is not the matter. He seems not to have made as much of it as he might.

ITINERANT. But there was no making or marring about it; he had simply to put down what I told him.

DISPUTANT. Well, he hasn't worked it up sufficiently. He lays too little stress, for example, on the extraordinariness of the weather—and that after drawing attention to the point in his introductory note.

ITINERANT. Ah ! That note is the only sentence in the book which the author inserted without consulting me. But I rather like it. I didn't notice the possible importance of the fact that my journeys took place in the spring and summer of 1893, until the author's note showed me the adventitious interest my itinerary may have. It is a good catch-penny note.

DISPUTANT. Then he repeats images about trees and blossoms, the sun and the moon.

ITINERANT. But that is not his fault ; he describes what I saw, and in the way I saw it. If the blackthorn blossom appeared to me for a whole forenoon like splashes of white paint on the brown woods, why shouldn't he say it as often as I noted

it? A mere 'derangement of epitaphs' is a very paltry trick. This repetition you object to is artistic, and of the same order as 'catchword' in a pantomime or in the writings of Carlyle and Matthew Arnold, of the same order as the chorus in a song, as parallelism in the old Hebrew writings, or as the burden in a ballad; and I don't think the author has overdone it.

DISPUTANT. Thirdly, the true spirit of the Rambler seems to me to be lacking.

ITINERANT. The true spirit of the Rambler! First of all, who has authority to define the 'true spirit of the Rambler'? You talk like an inquisitor, or a country reviewer. It is my spirit which is present.

DISPUTANT. Well then, you don't seem to have loitered enough.

ITINERANT. I never loitered when I wanted to hurry, or hurried when I felt the disposition to loiter. The things that interested me I bade the

author write of. When he questioned me concerning villages and towns which I had passed through unobservantly, I told him of green trees and turquoise skies, or of a foolish book, or of a wash at a pump, or of my talks with you. It is my mood which he has recorded, and it is a genuine record. When he wished to insert his own reflections, when he asked me for afterthoughts, 'No,' I said. 'Here are the thoughts, the half-thoughts, the moods that came to me on the way, and here are my discourings with my familiar, the Imaginary Disputant. These only you must use of reflective matter.' The author consulted me for every sentence. His book is a faithful account of my impressions.

DISPUTANT. But it seems to me to come so far short of the truth. For example, you must have seen, or heard, thousands—tens of thousands of sparrows. The author doesn't once mention the little rogues.

ITINERANT. Sparrows! You are wrong. I saw

them in St James's Park, and you'll find the author refers to the fact. But that was the only time I saw or heard sparrows during my journeys.

DISPUTANT. How absurd !

ITINERANT. Oh no ! Consider : did you ever see a sparrow ? You have heard and read about sparrows. The streets are full of them ; you know they exist. But you could not describe one, or say what like its note is. You have never seen a sparrow any more than you have seen the thousand and one men and women you passed in Fleet Street the last time you walked through it. *Did* you ever see a sparrow ?

DISPUTANT. You are too finical. Did you *see* the caterpillars falling through the leaves in Epping Forest ? How does the author's remark go ? 'The sound of the myriads of caterpillars dropping from leaf to leaf was like the patter of rain.' How about that ?

ITINERANT. I am not a naturalist. But if

that is incorrect the blame is really the author's. I told him of the extraordinary number of caterpillars I saw in Epping Forest, and of the pattering sound on the leaves which had puzzled me. He at once decided that it must have been the caterpillars tumbling about among the trees. I thought it rather an odd suggestion, but he consulted Gilbert White, and assured me that as there was nothing against the explanation in the 'Natural History of Selborne,' it must be correct.

DISPUTANT. My good Itinerant, the author has been quizzing you.

ITINERANT. Do you think so? Is his opinion not as good as Gilbert White's concerning a matter on which the latter has nothing to say?

DISPUTANT. Is your author a naturalist?

ITINERANT. I am afraid not. But that's of no consequence since Gilbert White's book is the only authority on Natural History in the world.

DISPUTANT. The only one!

ITINERANT. The author said so. He showed me the book too, and it was the only one on the subject he had.

DISPUTANT. Either he is inconceivably ignorant, or he has imposed on you. There are many admirable books of Natural History between Gilbert White and W. H. Hudson.

ITINERANT. Are there? I shall have to talk to my author. The treacherous villain! Now I hope you are done; for I have no desire to discuss any more.

DISPUTANT. How's that?

ITINERANT. Well, I happen to have been over-emotional of late, and as a penance I wish to fast from expression.

DISPUTANT. Over-emotional? Can one have too many, too powerful emotions? Why not say to the whole universe, 'Come and impress me; let me be shattered if I cannot bear the impression of it all.'

ITINERANT. Rather, the aim should be to comprehend the universe intellectually—to know it, not feel it. All emotion is developed at the expense of what is higher; all laughter, all tears are retrograde: out of a chaos of passion the world has gradually evolved intellect. Not to feel, not to imagine, not to think, but to know is the final cause of man.

DISPUTANT. And what shall we do with the pictures, the sculpture, the music, the poetry?

ITINERANT. That Science which has destroyed Faith will not hesitate to put an end to Art: all Art is sinful.

DISPUTANT. Yes, of course: so is Science; so is anything if you make a religion of something else.

ITINERANT. Quite so. Anything more?

DISPUTANT. Yes. I quite forgot to ask you why you stopped your journeys with July? There was a recurrence of the tropical weather in August.

ITINERANT. Because I lost my caprice for walk-

ing about after my second visit to the Chilterns. You, now, would have made a calendar of it, and gathered doggedly a report of every month. I think it is best to be inconstant: the moment you begin to think of the beauty of constancy love is dead. Besides the author wouldn't have written any more of it; he has taken to making ballads.

DISPUTANT. Has he? What kind of ballads?

ITINERANT. He sent me a copy of the last one. Shall I read it, and you can judge for yourself?

DISPUTANT. Do.

ITINERANT. He calls it 'A Ballad of a Musician.'

He wrought at one great work for years ;

The world passed by with lofty look :

Sometimes his eyes were dashed with tears ;

Sometimes his lips with laughter shook.

His wife and child went clothed in rags,
And in a windy garret starved :
He trod his measures on the flags,
And high on heaven his music carved.

Wistful he grew, but never feared ;
For always on the midnight skies
His rich orchestral score appeared
In stars and zones and galaxies.

He thought to copy down his score :
The moonlight was his lamp : he said,
' Listen, my love ; ' but on the floor
His wife and child were lying dead.

Her hollow eyes were open wide ;
He deemed she heard with special zest :
Her death's-head infant coldly eyed
The desert of her shrunken breast.

‘Listen, my love: my work is done ;

I tremble as I touch the page

To sign the sentence of the sun

And crown the great eternal age.

‘The slow adagio begins :

The winding-sheets are ravelled out

That swathe the minds of men, the sins

That wrap their rotting souls about.

‘The dead are heralded along :

With silver trumps and golden drums,

And flutes and oboes, keen and strong,

My brave andante singing comes.

‘Then like a python’s sumptuous dress

The frame of things is cast away,

And out of Time’s obscure distress

The thundering scherzo crashes Day.

‘For three great orchestras I hope
My mighty music shall be scored :
On three high hills they shall have scope
With heaven’s vault for a sounding-board.

‘Sleep well, love ; let your eyelids fall,
Cover the child ; good-night, and if . . .
What ? Speak . . . The traitorous end of all !
Both . . . cold and hungry . . . cold and stiff !

‘But no ; God means us well, I trust :
Dear ones, be happy, hope is nigh :
We are too young to fall to dust,
And too unsatisfied to die.’

He lifted up against his breast
The woman’s body stark and wan ;
And to her withered bosom pressed
The little skin-clad skeleton.

‘You see you are alive,’ he cried.

He rocked them gently to and fro.

‘No, no, my love, you have not died ;

Nor you, my little fellow ; no.’

Long in his arms he strained his dead

And crooned an antique lullaby ;

Then laid them on the lowly bed,

And broke down with a doleful cry.

‘The love, the hope, the blood, the brain

Of her and me, the budding life,

And my great music—all in vain !

My unscored work, my child, my wife !

‘We drop into oblivion,

And nourish some suburban sod :

My work, this woman, this my son

Are now no more : there is no God. *

'The world's a dustbin ; we are due,
And death's cart waits : be Life accurst !'
He stumbled down beside the two,
And clasping them, his great heart burst.

Straightway he stood at heaven's gate,
Abashed and trembling for his sin :
I trow he had not long to wait,
For God came out and led him in.

And then there ran a radiant pair
Ruddy with haste and eager-eyed
To meet him first upon the stair—
His wife and child beatified.

They clad him in a robe of light,
And gave him heavenly food to eat ;
Great seraphs praised him to the height,
Archangels sat about his feet.

God, smiling, took him by the hand,
And led him to the brink of heaven :
He saw where systems whirling stand,
Where galaxies like snow are driven.

Dead silence reigned ; a shudder ran
Through space ; Time furled his wearied wings ;
A slow adagio then began
Sweetly resolving troubled things.

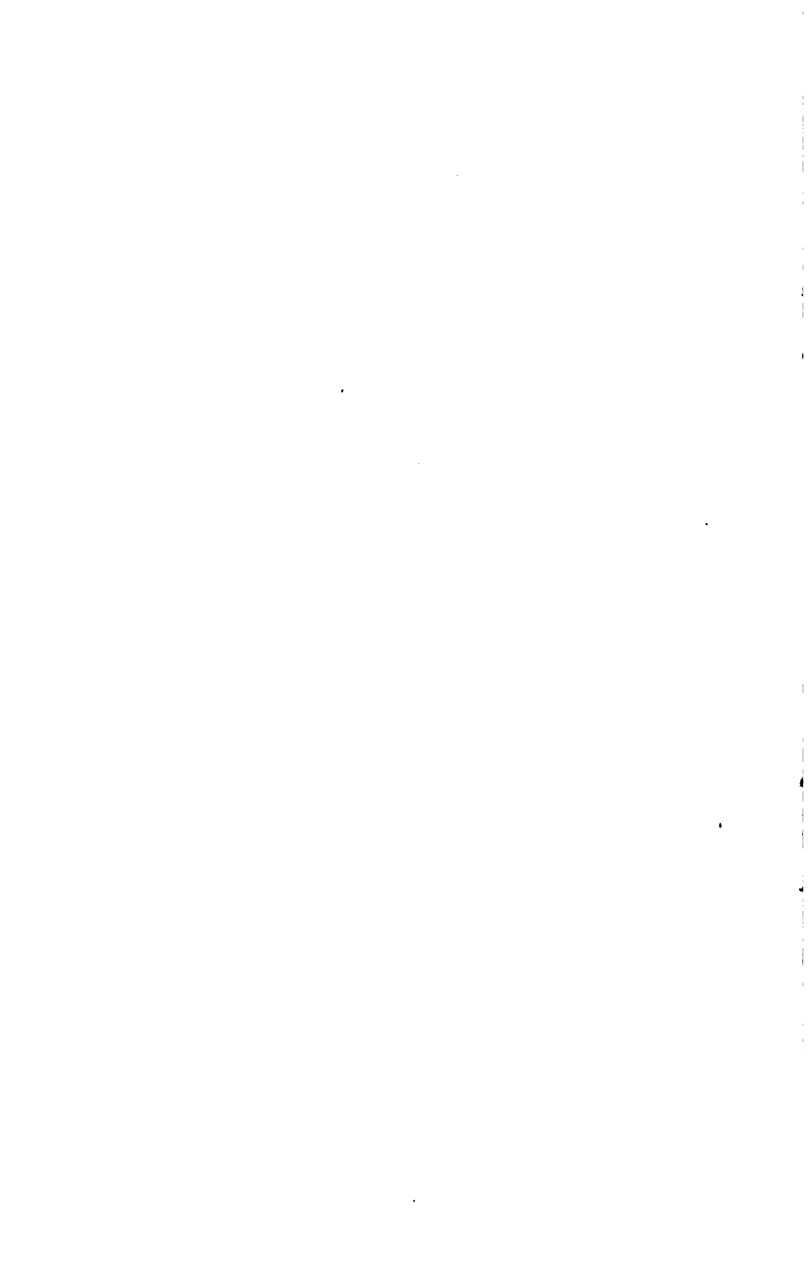
The dead were heralded along :
As if with drums and trumps of flame,
And flutes and oboes keen and strong,
A brave andante singing came.

Then like a python's sumptuous dress
The frame of things was cast away,
And out of Time's obscure distress
The conquering scherzo thundered Day.

He doubted ; but God said, ' Even so ;
Nothing is lost that's wrought with tears :
The music that you made below
Is now the music of the spheres.'

DISPUTANT. Hurrah !

THE END





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